

For those of you who are into cosmetics, remember that thinking ruins the face. / ... Passion?—It's merely neurosis. / Made in Itary: All's in Order: "Out of Order" Fashion's Inability to Divest of Power

By Christian Alborz Oldham/ Putting the Theory to the Test

Christian Alborz Oldham

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Art

University of Washington

2018

Committee:

Ellen Garvens

Rebecca Cummins

Aaron Flint Jamison

Emily Zimmerman

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Art

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Christian Alborz Oldham

University of Washington

Abstract

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Christian Alborz Oldham

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Ellen Garvens

Department of Photomedia

Clothing—its manufacture and its point of distribution and sale—is an apt illustration for the faults and entrapment of contemporary productive society as it relates to human and ecological rights and wellbeing. Artworks, like those produced by Sturtevant, are in place that manipulate readymade power and in doing so, point to the total structures that allow that very artwork to be shown. The fact that this work is given an immense public platform and standing in financial markets throws into question the efficacy of the artworks pointing and makes one aware of the very real possibility of criticism becoming capital. With this knowledge, what does it mean to be making work that disconcertingly falls within this potential cycle of critical production, which is largely similar and toxic to many other types of artistic production. When and how does model-building for alternative ways of living and producing stop being a type of Stockholm Syndrome, and become a practical and viable reality?

I

For those of you who are into cosmetics, remember that thinking ruins the face.

MR. HAINLEY: When you think about putting the show together, I know that a friend of a friend of mine, who was at the show, said the spots you were using to light the Marilyns were very particular –

MS. STURTEVANT: Spots.

MR. HAINLEY: – spots.

MS. STURTEVANT: Yes.

MR. HAINLEY: And I wondered if you could talk about where in your thinking process the installation for a show comes in to how the show manifests its –

MS. STURTEVANT: It's called thinking.

1

Elaine Sturtevant left us in 2014. She's remembered by most for a body of work that among other things, is highly controversial and embroiled in many intensely dense and philosophical conversations surrounding notions of labor and methods of production, as they deal with the act of creating and exhibiting artworks.

In order to speak about Sturtevant and her work in any meaningful way, her specific vocabulary must be defined unto her, to place us all on a leveled field of communiqué. Thus; copy, repeat, repetition, interiority, exteriority, total structure, cybernetics and origin, are understood best when built upon the philosophical writings of Deleuze and Foucault, with parallel relations to the historiographers Johann Joachim Winkelmann and Aby Warburg. As with these key words which we must define, there are also central tenants to the work of Elaine Sturtevant that must be clearly identified to grasp what I like to speak on, with two unshaken hands, rather than butterfingers. From the list of words you can see, critical writing and public perception about Sturtevant's work revolves socially and conceptually to the concept of "mimesis"² as introduced by the Greeks. However, also focusing on the concept of "origin"³ may provide a more fruitful framework.

To speak on mimesis, it's helpful to refer to an extensive three-hour interview conducted by Bruce Hainley⁴ and Michael Lobel⁵ with Sturtevant that took place in 2007. Hainley asks Sturtevant, knowing she was versed in the philosophy of Spinoza and Foucault, if perhaps her work, which on a visual level can be perceived as mimetic, was derived from their philosophical

¹ Sturtevant, interview by Michael Lobel and Bruce Hainley, *Oral history interview with Elaine Sturtevant, 2007 July 25-26*, Archives of American Art, July 25-26, 2007, 7.

² From the Greek root "to imitate." The same root is found in the word "actor." Mimesis is a theme of import to early European artistic production whose goal was most commonly to reproduce imagery from that of nature and life. What is important to note is that the work was always to be understood as a metaphor or signified event in three dimensional space. Artistic production at the time would try to complicate and mask this by adding illusionistic techniques to methods of production such as perspective and rendering.

"Copy, replica, mimesis, simulacra, fake, digital virtuality, clone..." In the words of Bruce Hainley, 'Sturtevant's work has been for more than forty years a meditation on these concepts by decidedly not being any of them.'" Sturtevant, Udo Kittelmann, Mario Kramer, Bernard Blitzen, and John Waters, *THE BRUTAL TRUTH*, Vol. 1, 2 vols, (Senefelderstraße, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hate Cantz Verlag, 2004), 21.

³ From Latin "originem" meaning "a rise, commencement, beginning, source; descent, lineage, birth." Douglas Harper, "Online Etymology Dictionary," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, n.d., Accessed March 2, 2017, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=origin&allowed_in_frame=0.

⁴ MFA professor of criticism and theory at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, and the Roski School of Fine Arts, USC. Hainley is the primary scholar of Sturtevant's work going back almost two decades.

⁵ Art History professor at Hunter College, CUNY.

writings. Sturtevant denies this by emphasizing that her idea and application of copy came from the Greeks, and perhaps it had originated even before with the suggestion that the theoretical concept of *copy*, was well established in pre-biblical times.

“Copy was not always demeaned; copy was, at some point, at a very high level.”⁶

If we are to take this statement and consider the work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, 18th century German art historian and archaeologist who pioneered the distinctions between Greek, Greco-Roman, and Roman art, we’ll find that although he takes the controversial stance that Greek art is the pinnacle of human achievement with everything else being derivative, he still believes in the individualism this process of derivation has, “...what is imitated, if handled with reason, may assume another nature, as it were, and become one's own.”⁷

Sturtevant, being 83 at the time of the interview, and having made the type of work in question since 1964, probably found herself explaining for the past 40 years the actuality of her work to many that most assuredly had trouble placing it. Her explanations, as seen at the beginning of the essay, appear curt, but she, along with her work demanded intense intellectual rigor and engagement. Those curt moments appear to be her taking the reigns so as to explain to her audience what the work is and what it is not, writing of her work in 1971: “If something is not yet known then only what it is not can be understood.”⁸ I mention this to introduce more words from Sturtevant regarding the concept of copy as it applies to her work, namely: “...firstly, copy doesn’t have any dynamics, okay? So that’s number one.”⁹ And “I said, ‘The idea that people would call it copy when they know absolutely nothing about copy.’ How can you say it’s copy if you don’t know anything about copy? One of the dynamics of copy is that it has to have interior resemblance, and this is one of the factors of repetition, and you don’t know that...They don’t know what copy is, but they insist on calling it copy, and so that’s a closing of the mind.”¹⁰

There is a strong disconnect that comes, without proper care for her own definitions, if one is to think about her seemingly estranged sentiments in this very paragraph. For her to call a misunderstanding of her interior definition of *copy*, the closing of a mind, specifically when the word was to be aimed at her work, was not necessarily a closing of the mind. According to her, without her interior being known all that could be understood was what the work itself was not. Therefore, by her own admission, she empathized with the same critics she catapulted away. For

⁶ Sturtevant, *Oral history interview with Elaine Sturtevant*, 21.

⁷ Moshe Barasch, *Theories of Art: 2. From Winckelmann to Baudelaire* (Howick Place, London: Routledge, 2016), 112.

⁸ In early 1971, Sturtevant wrote a letter to art dealer Reinhard Onnasch indicating what her work was not: “If something is not yet known then only what it is not can be understood. Therefore, although I am not about specifics, here are a few about what it is not. / The work cannot be treated in a material or / non intellectual way / I am not Anti-Art / I am not saying anyone can do it / I am not “poking fun at the artist”* / I am not “reporting the current scene”** / I am not in the process of celebrating process / I am not making copies / I am not making imitations / I am not interested in painting sculptures / or objects / I am not interested in being a “Great Artist” / That’s real medieval thinking.”

Sturtevant, Peter Eleey, Bruce Hainley, and Michael Lobel, *Double Trouble*, Edited by Diana C. Stoll (New York, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2015), 54.

⁹ Sturtevant, *Oral history interview with Elaine Sturtevant*, 21.

¹⁰ By stating that copy has dynamics, in this case, Sturtevant is referring to copy as a verb, as it relates to Winckelmann, not something such as a Xerox copy. Ibid., 20.

how could they know what wasn't known to them? Though she seems to, if not take offense, find herself tired or rather, at odds with the misreading of her work. At least subconsciously she understood the root.

In an interview between Gerd de Vries and Lena Maculan, de Vries summarizes that when Sturtevant spoke of "copy," what she indicates is something bereft of intrinsic energy comparative to what one may find in that of an original work.¹¹ It's also important to note that when "copy" is used by Sturtevant, it was not commonly referred to in the trans-historical definition as it refers to the Greeks, which opens it to the possibility of what Winkelmann suggests, namely, that if handled with enough care and consideration, the so called copy can become one's own. What she seems to be suggesting is that something like the work of someone sitting in a museum with an easel, painting a work by an old master, is arguably a demonstrative example of a work bereft of a certain type of frisson, meaningless copy that in the end is just a rather barren surface due to the absences of a rich hidden interior. Only with this depth and an intrinsic appreciation for the dynamism of her art practice does the word "copy" enter her vocabulary.

To Sturtevant a copy can transcend itself as a copy if given and approached with a certain attentiveness. Highly aware of her own practice this definition was not without the manual labor spent, say repainting a canonical masterwork, and certainly not without her "interior resemblance" along with its exterior counterpart and their relation to the idea of dynamism in art making and in particular within serial creation. "There is the inside and the outside. / There is the interior and the exterior. / Not as in the Foucault fold, but as in / essence, force and potency: / the interior silent power of art."¹² Sturtevant denies a relationship to traditional philosophy regarding interiority/exteriority by separating her critical thoughts on art practice from the sphere of Gilles Deleuze and his writings on Michel Foucault.

Deleuze's concept can be illustrated by thinking of a piece of paper folded in half; there you have two layers, contiguous and facing one another. Before the fold, the paper was flat with only front/back, or, to further simplify, the flat paper from another vista is a representation of a length of line with only an above/below. The fold introduces the possibility of an inside and outside, the paper is now more than a piece of paper with its new found interior and exterior. In other words, with the illustrative help of the paper metaphor, Sturtevant's "copy" can be seen as something inextricably linked to itself –folded, therefore despite her efforts her work is still enhanced if not viewed through the Deleuze discourse, and further linked to the barriers of linguistics, not to mention the notion of absences. As she explains, "Most certainly the exterior is visible, but references, memory, subjectivity — all the elements of interior process can change, distort, and even make an object what it is not."¹³ An obvious argument can be launched at this point: to expose what something isn't, by it's own nature, is to wordlessly expose that which was

¹¹ Sturtevant, Mario Kramer, Udo Kittelmann, Gerd de Vries, and Lena Maculan, *CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ*, Edited by Lena Maculan and Frankfurt am Main Museum für Moderne Kunst, Vol. 2, 2 vols (Senefelderstraße, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004), 35.

¹² Sturtevant, and Anne Dressen, *The Razzle Dazzle of Thinking*, Edited by Anne-Julie Esparcell, (Letzigraben, Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2010), 29.

¹³ Sturtevant, *The Razzle Dazzle of Thinking*, 148.

inversely implied. Thus the result is still not a fixed explanation, in that the subject only become more defined by keeping tally of what the subject is not.

The way in which interiority and exteriority of work seems to be defined by Sturtevant, can be understood as different from Deleuze and Foucault in part because she says so, but largely because in Deleuze's example, interior and exterior are both equivalent in that they can both be viewed/known to anyone that should come in contact with the folded paper, unlike Sturtevant's definition of interior/exterior. The greater reason for her dissidence from theories posited by art critics/historian based on the works of philosophic male canonical giants was simply that they were not talking about what she herself was doing/making. This wrong-way roundabout seems a tiring practice; to embroil outside theories in matters which are self-explanatory to an artist, and will henceforth result in a need for clarification out of said artist, to either confirm or explain away the comparison hefted upon them. If her annoyance was palpable, it was not without cause. Sturtevant was far more qualified to philosophically deconstruct her own work. When the theories of others were thrown at the artist as an investigation tool into her interior, a frustration of sorts would naturally result and be referred to as being "curt." Curt or tired of explaining something she intrinsically knew, Sturtevant differs from the comparison because her practice is an abstraction of logic in the idiosyncratic mind of an individual artist i.e. artworks, artist's intentions, the work's surface image and the question of image doubling. All of which relates directly to Sturtevant and her practice in that the work can be visually perceived as another's but has a radically different interiority.¹⁴

*...To go beyond the surface of art,
to prove the understructure,
the silent power of art,
demands utilizing representation's duality to
drastically reverse content.
Thus, when content no longer refers to the visible,
there is the radical leap from image to concept
from exterior to interior.*

*With this paradoxical and antagonistic method of resemblance but not-in-itself-resemblance, the source works are vigorously emptied and thus
are able to fulfill their role as catalyst.*

15

In understanding that Sturtevant views artwork, in part, by this innovative dualist point of view, helps in establishing an eccentric rubric for how to consider the nuanced differences in meaning and implications of such words as "copy" and "repeat" and "repetition." Copy has no intention other than being an exact double of the thing in which it copies. As Sturtevant warns, "...Copy

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 70.

In the same essay, Sturtevant also includes how she perceives the concept of the fold in her work as it compares to Deleuze's interpretation saying, "The fold of the interior without the exterior / is the vast barren interior of man. / Plato's dual action of Idea is now the / perpetual convolution of Same." Ibid., 69.

In another essay, Sturtevant clearly defines what she means by calling a work of art a catalyst, "The quest was to go beyond, to seek past the surface and reach for the under-structure — the silent power of art. The thinking was both long term and reflective; reflexion, meaning the confrontation of concept with objects. The determination that other art works could be used as catalysts to reveal the underside was both startling and terrifying. Startling in its validity and veracity, terrifying in its implications." Ibid., 147.

conceals dangerous / gaps.”¹⁶ Whereas *copy* to Sturtevant is an exercise in precision, *repeat*, an exercise in accuracy. “...Repeat is surface. You’re just talking about the surface.”¹⁷ Repeat, like copy, is surface in its visual presence, but with intentions in its act of duplicating, repeat can go just beyond the narrow bounds of copy, if done right. “[Repeat] desperately cares what it / ‘looks like’ rather than / containing silent power, / which is of no interest.”¹⁸ Andy Warhol, Sturtevant claimed, was the only person she associates as having been brilliant at repeating. To her, Warhol’s work did not engage in repetition, which has dynamism. His work dealt with image insofar that he was a copyist, but the critical sphere that his work was implicated within, rather than any inherent interior meaning Warhol imbued within his work, was something far beyond that of a mere copy. His skill at repeating was outlier.

Repetition:

Repetition is displaced difference.

Repetition is pushing the limits of resemblance.

Repetition is interior movement.

Repetition is jetting representation.

19

Repetition in the vocabulary of Sturtevant is defined as the action that is able to unlock the confrontation between someone’s expectations of what they see, and learning that although it looks to have been made by someone else, i.e. Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys, Jasper Johns, etc., it’s made by Sturtevant alone. In doing this, repetition “has shattered the link to content” by “push[ing] the limits of resemblance.”²⁰ By Sturtevant’s work resembling something so close to that of Warhol, Beuys, or Johns, that it’s perceived by a viewing audience as one of their works, the audience’s reaction, upon realizing it’s a work by Sturtevant, is often one of cognitive dissonance, due to a refusal to recalibrate expectation/presumption with visual reality. This reaction is not only because of the attribution of the artist, which is confounding to many, but in part because of the interior movement of the work, in Sturtevant’s language.

With the exterior being virtually the same to a viewing audience, it “displaces difference” and indeed pushes limits of resemblance while having an interior comprised of entirely different intentions.²¹ Thus what is unknown/absent is what makes for the work’s antipode interior, as mentioned the base of said interior is the fact that Sturtevant made the work to begin with, and running wild from there is every hidden motive/intention/action etc., waiting or not, to be discovered. This interiority, which confounds, is perhaps what Sturtevant means when she claims that the “the dynamics of repetition, [has] nothing to do with copy.”²² Sturtevant believes that by having such a work exist, a work that is perpetually between “being” and “becoming,” it is able to “dramatically narrow the gap between [being] visible and [being] articulate.”²³

¹⁶ Sturtevant, *The Razzle Dazzle of Thinking*, 29.

¹⁷ Sturtevant, *Oral history interview with Elaine Sturtevant*, 39.

¹⁸ Sturtevant, *The Razzle Dazzle of Thinking*, 30.

¹⁹ Ibid., 69.

²⁰ Ibid., 69, 148.

²¹ Ibid., 148.

²² Sturtevant, *Oral history interview with Elaine Sturtevant*, 34.

²³ Sturtevant, *The Razzle Dazzle of Thinking*, 148.

Then what is to make of Sturtevant's intention in making this work? As Lena Maculan explains, "Her references to the works of other artists do not relate to the work in terms of content or formal intention. This shows that Sturtevant's concern is not to address selected individual artworks but art in general."²⁴ In her own words:

Representation is brought to an abrupt halt in this body of work. Representation's duality, doubling back on itself, is reversed to forward. There is no representation of what is represented as it is not represented. The visible sign is not what which is represented. And the signifying is not double. There is no superimposition of idea and thus no idea of its representation.

25

Sturtevant uses and promotes a use of lateral thinking in order to consider that of the total structure in which art is made, presented, distributed, and exhibited. This goal implicates artists, gallerists, curators, among many other roles in the world of art, as being a part of her devices and tools for trying to communicate these intentions. As curator Peter Eeley explains in his forward to her MoMA publication, "Sturtevant sometimes insisted that she had no curators on the museum exhibitions that she presented in the last decade of her remarkable career... 'You don't do a show with me,' she once explained, 'I do a show with you.'"²⁶ Bruce Hainley posits that Sturtevant's underlying framework of the "total structure" is to, "take the lens back away from not just the artwork hanging on the wall, not just the gallery itself as a site that will be worked, but then the entire dynamic structure of what allows this [art] to be presented at a given moment," to which Sturtevant heartily agrees.²⁷ She explains that these devices, of trying to reveal the total structure of art, is to trigger thinking about the work in all of its complications and complexities.

The directions in which Sturtevant seems to want to point to in the thinking of the audience, seems to logically lead to the concept of "origin" in all of its ambivalence when it comes to the world of art and art making, and maybe especially regarding Sturtevant's own practice.

However, the contemporaneous movement toward a more digital and cyber existence over the last three decades has perhaps made the search for and identification of origins a romantic notion, having already "plunk[ed] copyright into mythology."²⁸ This mindset seems to speak to another pillar of historiography—this time from another German, Aby Warburg, whose work carried from the 19th to 20th centuries. Warburg is known for having created a project entitled *Mnemosyne*, a pictorial atlas begun in the mid-1920s whose purpose was trying to map and present archetypical depictions of western antiquity in the art and current affairs of the world to help portray "immediate, synoptic insights into the afterlife of pathos-charged images depicting what he dubbed 'bewegtes Leben' (*life in motion*)."²⁹ Relying on images of western antiquity's simulacra, copy, mimesis, repeat, and repetition, to depict these visual cycles, Warburg's goals

²⁴ Sturtevant, *CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ*, 34.

²⁵ Sturtevant, *The Razzle Dazzle of Thinking*, 148.

²⁶ Sturtevant, *Double Trouble*, 13.

²⁷ Sturtevant, *Oral history interview with Elaine Sturtevant*, 11.

²⁸ Sturtevant, *The Razzle Dazzle of Thinking*, 278.

²⁹ Christopher D. Johnson, "About the *Mnemosyne* Atlas," *Mnemosyne: Meanderings through Aby Warburg's Atlas*, n.d., Accessed March 4, 2017, <https://warburg.library.cornell.edu/about>.

seem not entirely unrelated from that of Sturtevant's. Whereas Sturtevant produced imagery that helps engender polemics about origin, Warburg arranged and catalogued it. In the work of both Warburg and Sturtevant, there is a particular concern for provenance. This, in Sturtevant's work, became of more and more import as time passed and digitalism marched forth. Sturtevant's concept and concern of image over image,³⁰ cyber virtuality,³¹ and the possibility to copy without repercussion³² in today's digital world, comes from her belief that with swift changes in contemporary art, speaking of originality is perhaps futile. She attributes this to is the dearth of aesthetic discourse in the realm of art, saying that current art is a "desiring machine" with new "events" sought compulsively by the market and its inhabitants over critical dialogue which simultaneously renders originality as non-functional.³³ In today's world, more and more, homo-sapien sapien –the word itself has even doubled, is growing closer to Sturtevant's interiority and unstoppably towards her philosophies. It takes but one look at the world of today to know,

Man is double.

Man is copy.

Man is clone.

Man is dispensable.

Man is disposable.

Double is original.

Copy is original.

Image is origin.

34

For those of you who are into cosmetics, remember that thinking ruins the face.

—STURTEVANT³⁵

³⁰ Alternatively, surface over surface, exteriority with no interiority, meaningless thing upon meaningless thing.

³¹ Sturtevant defines cybernetics as "speed, information, and access" and these concepts have engulfed the world into a "reality [that] is not real." She argues, the order of things is no longer the same, with space and time, object and image, light and speed, all being reversed. Thus comes about, "surface disorder and psyche change." Sturtevant, *The Razzle Dazzle of Thinking*, 127, 149.

³² Physical repercussion, that is. In thinking about cyber virtuality, Sturtevant links the speed of information with "...power, Speed generates "elimination," / permits misinformation, disorients time and / place..." and that with the speed of virtual copy brings about "...dearth of creativity and, perhaps, death of thinking." Ibid., 139, 148.

³³ Ibid., 147.

³⁴ Ibid., 139.

³⁵ Ibid., 183.

One last story:

I had a studio in the south of France, and so it was on the street level in an old part of Antibes and there was a – it had a big window and because it was open, some guy – [laughs] –I'm sure I told you this story. So some guy stops by and he says are you Jasper Johns? [Hainley and Lobel laugh.] Because I was working on the Flag, and I said, "Yes" [Hainley and Lobel laugh]. He said, "Oh."

"Here I am."

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Sturtevant's



Johns'

³⁶ Sturtevant, *Oral history interview with Elaine Sturtevant*, 17.

II

... Passion?—It's merely neurosis.

All's In Order

"Out of Order" Fashion's Inability to Divest of Power

- Terre Thaemlitz

Originally posted on comatonse.com January 27, 2010. First presented at "Out of Order: A Matter of Principle," organized by Andrea Sick and Dorthea Mink at HFK Bremen (Bremen University of the Arts), Bremen, Germany, January 23-24 2010. Published in **Fashion - Out of Order: Disruption as Principle**, ed. by Dorothea Mink. (Germany: Arnoldsche, 2011.)

As someone who spent the majority of my teens altering and reconstructing out-of-fashion second hand clothing, I somehow always carried the notion that I liked fashion. In the same way that I thought I liked music despite absolutely hating the overwhelming majority of things I heard, so did I think I liked fashion despite my being absolutely horrified by the visual and social implications of most men's and women's clothing - the tyranny of which begins immediately with our first blue or pink baby jumpers. In the early '80s, the clothing options for males in a mid-Western U.S. town like Springfield, Missouri, were limited to those deadening cuts and dark, solid colors one would expect to come from the puritanical sensibilities of evangelical jackasses. Women had a bit more selection than men, as the U.S. was at the peak of its first obesity-pride movement, which encouraged plus size women to wear vivid prints and colors. But in my town, there were still many people who believed women's pants, along with polyester blend underwear, were the work of the Devil, so many women wore dark navy coulots - those long, baggy shorts that go below the knee and are cut to look like a skirt from a distance. Apparently Jesus loves the ladies in coulots.

My strategy at age 16, then, was to wear anything with vivid colors and obnoxious prints - the less fashionable the better. Given the lack of commercially available options at the discount department stores my parents frequented, I turned to clothes found in second hand shops and boxes buried in my packrat father's basement. For shirts, I wore old flannel pajama tops from the '50s with gothic wallpaper patterns; for pants, I took in my father's old 152cm waist pants from the '60s with 20cm-deep pleats, and tapered the legs so tight around my ankles that I sometimes had to cut the seams open again to take them off; my belt was a frayed brown extension cord, which I considered an update to the old hobo classic of holding one's pants up with rope; on my feet I wore black leather dress shoes with large brass buckles that resembled those worn by Puritan Pilgrims, or else I copied my older brother's punk fashion of black engineer boots wrapped with two or three kilos of heavy duty towing chain; and of course, no outfit was complete without a massive assortment of rhinestone costume jewelry - layer upon layer of necklaces, bracelets and clip-on earrings. I occasionally wore old women's beige slips over my jeans, or one-piece dresses made from bed sheets I had hand died and printed with pen inks and other non-standard dyes laying around the house. My self-cut hair style, which resembled a messy homage to the lead singer from A Flock of Seagulls, was appropriately described by my father as a "God damned rat's nest." I would occasionally color it with Marks-A-Lot permanent markers.

I did not particularly care for the majority of clothes I chose to wear. Liking them seemed

irrelevant. They were simply the antithesis of what I considered at the time to be dominant culture's fascist fashion conspiracy against individuality in "America, the Land of the Free." I say they were clothes I "chose" to wear, but at the time my behavior seemed mandated by the idealist values indoctrinated in me as a naïve American child. They were my duty, without a doubt. But, as one can imagine, this fashion put me in physical harm's way. In fact, if I didn't have the experience of regularly getting my nerdy ass kicked throughout the previous nine years of schooling - during which time I tried my best to fit in with everyone else - I might have actually believed those around me who said I was bringing the violence upon myself. But I knew my deviant appearance was not an invitation for violence. I knew it was the result of a social split, a psychotic episode resulting from nearly a decade of fag-bashing that predated any individual awareness of sexual desire, and which extended to homophobic insults by school faculty. Despite my borrowing fashion ideas from New Wave album covers, in Springfield there was no communal component to my look; no big-city group of New Wave outsiders for me to hang out with. It was as anti-social a gesture as it appeared. In effect, if those around me insisted upon seeing me as a faggot-nuisance despite my attempts at assimilation, then by God I would show them what a faggot-nuisance I could be.

Although it's true that the theatrics of my appearance had an ability to transform otherwise invisible daily bashings into vivid scenes from American cinema, I was in no way director of the events around me. I was simply providing the contrast that allowed one to see the absurdity of dominant culture. For example, there was the time when a pick-up truck of school athletes wielding baseball bats- a lynch mob - came to my parents' house and, with their wholesome All-American appearance, simply rang the doorbell and calmly asked my father if I was at home. Fortunately, I was out. However, my father was so taken in by their trustworthy appearance that he proceeded to tell them where they could find me; and until I had explained to him their true intentions, he had actually felt prideful relief in his freakish son finally socializing with normal types. Then there were the times I would be leaving work to the sound of voices screaming across a vast parking lot, "Thaemlitz is a dead little faggot!" - a phrase interwoven with the squeal of car tires heading my way such that the two sounds became cross-synthesized with one another, and another car chase was on. Those boys wore the clothes which, in their AIDS-phobia, I was warned not to bleed on as they shoved and threw me around - although the irony and black humor of mid-punch phrases like, "Bleed on me and I'll fucking kill you, AIDS bait!" was completely lost on them. In my mind, they were the true embodiments of "out-of-order" fashion, their appearances wrought with social chaos and destruction, all in a most literal sense. "Out of order" fashion could only hope to wield such vanguard leadership potential.

It wasn't always like this. Before my family was relocated to Missouri in 1981 we had lived in the outskirts of St. Paul, Minnesota, where there was an abundance of freshwater lakes, the public proudly identified as politically progressive, and the children dressed like spacemen. At least, that was my pre-teen goal, as I clothed those around me in capes, long boots, winter gloves, and motorcycle helmets decorated with colored duct tape. It was around this same time that I convinced by grandmother, a former seamstress, to make me an altar boy's gown in black rather than white, so I could become Death. But these pre-teen exploits were also less about imagination or creativity than about contextual reactions - reactions to the bizarre, twice-outgrown hand-me-down fashions bestowed upon me as a middle son who was smaller than both his older and younger brothers. I often joke that my interest in cross dressing came from being

forced to wear clothes worn so thin by my brothers that by the time I got them they were as sheer as negligees. As a result of the pacing of these hand-me-downs, I was aware of the industrial cycles of fashion from a very early age. When solids were in fashion, I was the geek in plaids and patterns. When patterns were cool, I was wearing solids.

Having to wear facially distorting Coke-bottle glasses since the age of two was another major fashion factor in my socialization as a youth. There was an animalistic reaction of the children around me to the distortions of my lenses that caused them to fearfully and vehemently ostracize me, similar to how they might reject other children with more severe handicaps or deformities. (Between scientific advances in thinner lenses, as well as cultural shifts, I am told some of these dynamics have waned. I can only hope so.) To make matters worse, my well-intending father (who did not wear glasses) suffered from the delusion that bigger lenses would allow me to "see more" - when in fact the curvature of the larger lenses was so deep that only the center was functional. Still, he would demand the optician construct custom glasses using the largest lens size available for a given frame, and combine that with the bows from a smaller frame in the same style - the frame size which was actually appropriate for my head. This continued until I left home at age 18. Yes, it was eyeglasses, and the experience of being a cyborg physically dependent upon body-correcting devices, which introduced those links between fashion, biology and sociology that eventually developed into my use of transgenderism and cross-dressing as an active means of cultural- and self-criticism.

In all of this time, although I assumed my interest in manipulating appearance meant that I liked fashion, fashion was never my friend. Ultimately, it was a case of misplaced admiration, similar to my mistaking a like of sound for a like of music. Like so many things in life, processes of denaturalizing our associations with industry and tradition span decades, such that I did not fully realize I despise fashion - that my approach toward dressing was not an effort at fashion reform, but that I actually live in diametric opposition to the motivations and objectives of the fashion industry - until my early 30's. The news came to me in the form of an argument with my partner at the time. It was my thirty-third birthday, and I guess my overly expressive face gave away the fact that I did not like her gift of a rather ugly, but expensive and slightly avant-garde brand name shirt... which also happened to be a size too small. My failed apologies led to her saying, "When I met you, you said you liked fashion, but you really don't. You can't stand when I watch fashion shows or fashion programs on television. You hate designers. You hate models. You hate fashion brands. You dress in drag but you hate women's clothes. You also hate men's clothes... You hate fashion!"

Although her take on what constituted "fashion" was rather enslaved to the mainstream industries, she was right. There was nothing about fashion that I wished to assist, transform or resurrect. Whatever movement around clothing I had in my life was not planned, but simply a compulsive reaction to my environment - like the flailing arms of someone helplessly drowning in a bottomless ocean. My movements were not about swimming in this cultural ocean, nor about directional mobility, but a panic reflex triggered by a fear of death - both a symbolic death of self-identity, and a material-based fear of violence and bashings from others. Realizing this was a liberating un-becoming. It erased the guilt I had carried for decades as a result of never having fun with clothing, but rather only using it to mediate my fear of appearing before others. Of course, the pressure to enjoy fashion increases tenfold within MTF communities, where

transsexuality and transvestism collide in an ideological train wreck of theatrics, desires, seductions, fetishisms, and sensualities. Our oppressions are overshadowed by facades of self-control. Alienation is eclipsed by a mood of self-actualization. Insecurities become twisted into pantomimes of pride, such that any motives rooted in cultural resistance are depoliticized by the celebratory appearance of our Queenish actions. Taken to the extreme, we arrive at the ever-willing-to-entertain Asian Ladyboy, whose paper-thin appearance of acceptance in her tyrannically homophobic homeland (such as Thailand, with its legal ban against homosexual government employees) betrays the reality of her simply doing what it takes to gain social acceptance as a male sodomite. Even more extreme is the state funded sexual reassignment surgery program in Iran, the sound of which has a progressive ring to Western ears, when it is actually an anti-progressive Islamic fatwah enacted shortly after the overthrow of Shah Pahlavi in 1979. This fatwah presents the Iranian male sodomite with a choice between life as an Islamic woman or life in constant fear of being murdered by the hands of strangers or one's own family. Meanwhile, here in the West, only one person has more pressure than a fag to be the life of a party: a fag in a dress. To be even more precise, a black fag in a dress. (On the other hand, gender-mixed crowds expect very little of FTM's and cross-dressing lesbians, who often find themselves ignored and avoided.)

Thus, whereas most people like to celebrate the illogical pleasures of "dressing up," I only anticipate the illogical rage and violence that is, ironically, equally capable of being triggered by our failed attempts to pass as "normal" or "real" women and men, as well as our attempts to lessen our feelings of failure by transforming ourselves into something "other than normal." While the fashion industry contemplates the possibilities of "non-law-abiding fashion" in relation to a woman's publicly exposed nipple (and not just any nipple, but the nipple of a very particular shape, color, age and body type), I find myself preoccupied by a different series of "non-law-abiding" fashion issues. Issues of illegality that do not lie with the fashion industry's playful attempts at deviance and scandal, but with the violently illegal actions of people - overwhelmingly male - who claim their acts of rape and gay-bashing were inspired and justified by the fashions of their victims. Claims which, although they may not hold up in a court of law in most Western societies, do possess cultural credibility. Thus, here I stand in my 40's, still afraid of getting my ass kicked. It makes no difference whether I am dressed as a man or a woman, a norm or a freak. The entirety of fashion as a celebratory medium has no resonance for me because I cannot identify with the cultural bases of power and domination it unfailingly celebrates - whether the location of that celebration is straight or queer, two-gendered or other-gendered, prudish or aesthetically scandalous. The urgency of social crises around these issues preempts my capacity for joy, and extends to my refusal to celebrate the symbolic spill of blood on the fashion runway through rebellious or impractical designs. I am trying to *get away* from bloodlust.

The world of fashion echoes with jingoistic claims of "shaping and changing what is perceived as 'mainstream,'" anticipating that "the deviant becomes the new rule," and a religious belief that "fashion leads the way." I am not simply talking about the spew of commercial rhetoric one sees on television or reads about in magazines. These are actual phrases used in the synopsis of this very symposium, "Out of order - a matter of principle." Seemingly ignoring a century of critique, the symposium's title itself is like an ode to the moral necessity of the avant-garde - a most classic and traditional avant-garde whose duty, on principle, is to generate those "chance events"

which shall "become controllable and be analyzed as possible trends." As with other Modernist avant-garde's, these claims to cultural power - real or imagined, causal or symptomatic - constitute a problematic pseudo-politicization of their own marketplace in which "fashion suicide" (the act of designing against the fashion of the day out of a desire for cultural rupture) becomes a repeated cycle intended not to sever or destroy power relationships, but rather to endear the suicidal "out of order" fashion victim to dominant culture and secure its commercial embrace.

"Out of order" fashion is, from the outset, a manipulative cry for help comparable to attempting suicide when one knows one only has half the pills necessary to complete the job. The gesture of severing cultural norms reflects a death wish, but the means themselves are seldom intended to complete the task at hand. This macro-psychology of fashion culture's death wish is paralleled on the micro-level through widespread individual problems such as Class A drug use, anorexia and bulimia - problems which actually facilitate many peoples' successful participation within fashion industries. "Out of order" fashion, despite its celebratory grandeur, is the commodified image of misery. Its pleasures are a pacifying decoy, like LGBT Pride gatherings, in the midst of our domination.

As a fashion victim of another kind, who has no interest in commercial embrace or reconciliation, I have found "out of order" fashion's "anti-social yet commercially viable" concept of clothing to be even more oppressive and devious than evangelical prudery. The critique of dominant culture offered by impracticality and unwearability are no more than theatrics within an arena of mass spectacle, often reflecting a luxury of experimentation only granted by wealth and canonization. Unsellable fashion - the risqué face of a conservative industry - is more often than not the masturbatory privilege of corporate leaders whose lifestyle gluttony is funded by the bulk sale of their branded hand towels and sweat shirts to the less fortunate. It is the insulting cake offered up by Marie Antoinette. A cake we are all too eager to eat, as if without adverse implications.

Speaking of Marie, how many designers do you think would have refused participation in fashion films such as "Marie Antoinette" or "Elizabeth" on political grounds, refusing to associate with projects exalting feudalism at worst, or feigning ambivalence on the subject at best? I doubt you could find a single one. In this way, the suicide, or rupture, proposed by avant-garde fashion is rooted in a romantic identification with the prideful, arrogant death wishes of monarchs on the verge of dethronement; and not in the more realistic suicide of faceless, impoverished nobodies pushed to the brink by dominant social mores, principles and trends. This is because fashion, as an industry, remains enamored of patrons and the patron system. The fashion industry's complicity with the brutalizing moralities implied in the systems of domination it mutually supports and is supported by, all the while claiming to speak from a position of social-minded "principle," is the disgrace of "out of order" fashion. It is the arrogance that would, for example, lead people in fashion to cite the social acceptance of women's slacks as a case of the clothing industry transforming gender relations; a view which erases the material struggles of women who wore men's clothes in their attempts to gain male privileges such as suffrage, the right to own property, or even to join the military. Women who were sometimes beaten, raped and murdered as a result of their wardrobes. (Again, we come back to the lack of entertainment value placed on FTM and cross-dressing lesbians at parties, precisely because they

remind us our capacity for humor is at times outweighed by the traumas of life without a penis under patriarchy.) Industry and distribution do not remind us of these bold and brutalized women, but actually erase our memories of their actions by saying the acceptance of women in pants was simply a matter of exposing enough people to a certain cut of cloth over a long enough period of time. The fact that male dresses remain a cultural oddity after nearly a century of women's slacks shows how little fashion is doing to dismantle the images of patriarchy, or to divest men of their traditions. To the contrary, women's slacks - as a symbol of women's liberation with no corollary male transformation - simply reaffirm associations between power and traditional male fashion under patriarchy.

As someone who is not interested in empowerment, but interested in divestments of power, the cultural changes proposed by the fashion industry - no matter how outrageous they may look on the runway - mean nothing to a person such as myself. Instead, I feel molested. Raped. Violated. In my lifetime I have seen the effects and signs of poverty - of wear and tear, and second-hand fashion - become co-opted by the rich. I have come to see torn T-shirts and tattered jeans sold for more than the cost of a month's rent. (That's one month of my rent - how many months rent for the third-world employees working in garment factories?) I see young Japanese punkers (who don't listen to punk rock at all, but listen to J-pop) wearing €500 pants, and €800 hair weaves, with not a single self-made or self-altered item on their bodies. I have seen people proudly walking around in Richmond jeans with the word "RICH" emblazoned across their asses - to which I responded by patching the word "BROKE" across the back of a pair of my own used jeans. And I have seen people around the world and of all classes swallow these trends, both in the form of the poor's fantasy-driven eagerness to see themselves in the rich, and as a means for the rich to camouflage themselves amidst those they exploit with ever increasing economic imbalances. I have seen every single signifier of my own experience twisted into blades wielded by the very industries and cultural systems I sought to resist. I stand empty handed. Which is precisely where I began back in Reagan-era Springfield, Missouri: surrounded by peers robbed of class consciousness; wealth and industry ridiculing poverty; the possibilities of guerilla fashion and fashion terrorism commodified and regurgitated back upon us as a privilege of excess, at which point we gobble it up off the floor like dogs. I'm getting too old for this shit... and this time around I can't afford the new clothes or the used ones, which is why I *still* wear clothes found in my father's basement.

What has changed are my reactions to these circumstances - changes largely mandated by the economics of adulthood (ie., the necessity for employment). Although we like to portray our student years in high school and university as the time for struggling with our relationships to identity systems, it was only after graduation that my real struggles with issues of gender and sexual representation began. The impossibility for gender-fuck within standard work environments (let alone everyday actions such as grocery shopping), combined with intolerance in personal relationships, resulted in a strict gender divide within my wardrobe. Daily life took place in male clothes. Similarly, my cross-dressing became traditionally feminine and concerned with "passability." Both wardrobes revolved around concerns for personal safety, ranging from the ability to maintain employment to avoiding being singled out for bashing on the street. And although in recent years I have minimized my use of cosmetics and wigs when dressed in women's clothes, this rather clear gender divide continues to dominate my appearance. While the closets underlying this divide - both sociological and industrial - are not at all

surprising, there were also unexpected closets over the years. For example, during my DJ residency at the midtown Manhattan transsexual sex worker club "Sally's II" in 1990 and '91, the fact that the majority of transgendered people there were engaging in hormone therapies and surgical alterations often led to the judgmental ostracization of non-medinating drag queens, such that I was ashamed to out myself as transgendered within the heart of a transgendered safe-space. Rather, I came to work in male drag, a habit which continues to influence my wardrobe when appearing as DJ Sprinkles.

When I do wear women's clothes - particularly within an employment context - my general approach is to downplay elements of camp, and dress in relatively standard apparel. Beyond safety concerns related to drawing excessive attention to oneself in potentially homophobic and transphobic environments, this is also a strategic rejection of the stereotype of the flaming queen, and the demand upon transgendered people to submit ourselves as fodder for entertainment and spectacle. This resistance to performance plays a large part in my electroacoustic audio performances, which seek to infiltrate media festivals and other events with deliberately boring and unsatisfying experiences for the audience, organizer and performer. In fact, if I feel my invitation for employment is rooted in a fetishization of my status as a transgendered performer, and the promoter seems overly enthusiastic about my appearing in female drag, I will deliberately appear in men's clothing. Although this may be taken as personal betrayal (by not being "true to oneself"), contractual betrayal (by not fulfilling an employer's expectations), or even communal betrayal (by failing to show a particular kind of "transgendered pride" that conquers "the closet"), I feel it is imperative that people question their expectations around transgendered bodies - particularly since the primary condition of transgendered life around the globe is not celebratory self-actualization, but secrecy and the repressions of the closet. In the end, for transgendered people to only be granted public audience when playing the role of a campy snap diva who appears to her straight audiences as having transcended the troubles of life, in effect absolving dominant culture of its crimes by persisting despite domination, is the ultimate manifold betrayal enacted upon and enacted by ourselves.

At a personal loss for what to do, the tyrannical demand to "look fabulous" in drag (or conversely "over the top grotesque") has pushed me to try to publicly discuss the turmoil of being born with a penis, commonly dressed in men's clothing, yet still transgendered identified. Since men's clothing seems to offer a visual reconciliation with dominant cultural expectations around my body (which grants a degree of personal safety, yet betrays my political and cultural outlooks), and since this reconciliation is denied me when dressed in women's clothes (which also revolve around a patriarchal image of femininity that betrays my political and cultural outlooks), clothing ceases being about self-representation. It is reduced to a manifestation of the dissonances between identity and experience. This, for me, is a valid starting point for cultural investigation around clothing. But it is vital to remember within this formula fashion is not a facilitator of investigation, but an enabler of that which is under scrutiny. Fashion is the medium through which I find my body granted and robbed of privilege.

It was in the project *Trans-Sister Radio*, an electroacoustic radio drama commissioned by Hessischer Rundfunk in 2004, that I attempted to discuss the legal implications and risks of these privileges as they apply to transgendered mobility, internationalism and migration. In particular, I questioned the various relationships between gender transitioning, spousal visas and marriage

as sex work; all of which were very scary issues for me to discuss openly at the time since my spousal visa in Japan was pending renewal, and I had not yet received permanent residence status (which grants a bit more legal independence and expressive flexibility). And, as if to demonstrate the very notions of privilege at issue, it was a year later when the follow-up broadcast *The Laurence Rassel Show* found itself cancelled for favoring the ever unfashionable term "feminism" over the trendiness of "transgenderism."

In my opinion, fashion - like the visual arts and music - seems to lack any potential for repoliticizing the terminology of anti-traditionalism and revolution that have been rendered numb by over-saturated industrial ad copy. And, as with other media industries, the root of this impossibility seems to be its participants' ideological disconnection from the systems of violence through which the fashion industry constructs and perpetuates itself. Even when social issues do arise in the fashion world, they are so over-stylized and steeped in centuries-old Christian aesthetics of martyrdom - those same aesthetics which transform a bleeding Christ on the cross from an image of tradition-shattering horror to one of sublime and pacifying beauty - that we find ourselves hypnotized by the sensuality of our oppressions, even longing for their familiarity. I am not against sado-masochism (although I admit I find it personally boring, childish, and lacking the cultural potential proclaimed by Foucault and the rest); and within a Judeo-Christian heritage you would be in the minority if you were not to find grace in misery - it is the core of our social pacification and domination. But I do feel compelled to protest when the fashion industry - any industry - claims to stand at the vanguard of a culture (vanguardism being a ridiculously transcendental claim in itself), and with a peoples' best interests in mind, yet perpetuates the miseries of those people consistently and without fail. When our attempts at resistance are seamlessly and invisibly transformed into marketable trends, this is a mark of complicity, and not of success. In this way, "out of order" fashion is simply a very elaborate cultural sedative granting the illusion of mobility within a rigid socio-economic system.

I am speaking, of course, as someone who faces similar limitations working in the audio marketplace, where we all know "alternative music" is nothing more than a marketing ploy. And we all know from personal experience how fashion and music are interwoven as means of self-identification and socialization, functioning as signals to attract and repel those around us. So I am not speaking from a position of superiority, or higher understanding. I am speaking as a dupe; a sheep infected with the same diseases of desire as the rest of you. It is from this common base that I wish to say I do not believe we can transform industry into something liberating, any more than I believe transgenderism allows us to transform our bodies into something liberating. Culturally, our liberation is not up for negotiation. Socio-economically speaking, capitalism relies upon our exploitation. And, of course, the fashion industry is notorious for its systematic reliance upon sub-standard work policies, ranging from unpaid internships to Third World slave labor. Even the heralded "sweat free" factories of Cambodia only pay workers €20 per month (averaging 25% overtime).

Rather than fantasizing about liberation through industry, industries need to be de-essentialized/denaturalized/dereified as vehicles of moralistic principle, and seen as material processes - not ideological processes - so that we may restructure our ideological relations to those material processes. This includes demystifying "out of order fashion" as "a matter of principle," so as to better understand its propagandistic functions within a larger dominant cultural context - because, like so many alternative culture industries, the principles being served

are rarely those we wish them to be. In fact, they most often betray us. These ideological associations between industry and liberation, industry and leadership, industry and our social potential for realizing an inherently flawed concept of benevolent power, all need to be dismissed before we can even begin to think about the true topics we claim we wish to discuss. As a labor base enslaved to one industry or another in the service of domination (economic domination, national domination, global domination), what is first at issue is what kind of slaves we choose to be within those dominant systems.

Refuse to attach your dreams to the fashion industry's attacks on taste, even if you support them with your labor. Do not be ideologically seduced by the martyrdom of impractical clothing, as it is ultimately a sacrifice to the cultural Father. You may design it, you may manufacture it, you may sell it - but realize you do so as a slave, a dupe, a sheep, kissing the ass of H&M or whatever major company you or those around you pray will pick up on your patterns - hopefully after, and not before, you copyright them. Feel the weight of being forced to kiss this filthy, rotting ass. Breathe it in. Taste it. Vomit from it. Because it is only from the necessity to end the unacceptable that our principles take on importance; and even so, only for a moment.

We all know principles are contextual - not rooted in "universal human truths," but in times and places - and in this sense they strike me as very poorly served by dreams of mobility or freedom. Those may be things we desire on a subjective level, but they are not at the root of our urgency nor a basis for social action. The institutionalization of principles, including "out of order fashion" as a matter of principle, is ultimately an extension of the domination we claim we wish to diminish. If, indeed, one's interest is in a type of cultural transformation which goes against domination, and which seeks to minimize the violence of current social praxis, then it seems imperative to actively and critically address issues of fear, violence, and culturally mandated hypocrisy. I am not talking about designing a season on the theme of domestic violence, or ribbon campaigns, or anti-fur advertising campaigns featuring nude fashion models, or other forms of political profiteering. There is always a cultural surplus of that sort of propaganda, which is about as socially engaged as choosing to pay with a high interest credit card because your credit company, which systematically bankrupts millions of people annually, will donate a fraction of a percentage to some mainstream charity hemorrhaging with administrative overhead. I am talking about recognizing one's own placement in a moment of crisis from which all directions are traps, and to then leave oneself vulnerable to crisis. As a member of the audio-activist collective Ultra-red recently wrote me, "once confronted with that crisis (the crisis of one's alienation), then one either enters into it to see what can be learned, or one retreats (aggressively) to the very modes of being that affirm and nurture the alienation."

One of the peculiar difficulties of working within academia and the arts is that the theme of principles is so omnipresent, yet simultaneously entrenched in those modes of being which foster our alienation. As systems, they are not unlike religion. In fact, the histories of higher education and the arts are entwined with the history of monasteries, convents and cloisters. As a result, we find that the language that emerges from and sustains these judgmental social systems is ass-backwards, and obsessed with the illusion of providing spaces devoid of judgment. A neurotic desire to believe our institutionalization is non-judgmental stops us from entering deeper into our alienations within these rigid systems, since giving our alienations visibility and conscious identification without claiming to know a means of resolution becomes tantamount to failure. Of

course this is, in itself, judgmental and reflects the trauma of an educational system that demands we pass to advance, and punishes failure.

Based on my own experiences, I find that when these hypocrisies underlying our gatherings are directly called into question, members of the audience invariably arrive at two reflexive reactions: first, they ask what they are to do (or more specifically, what I want them to do); and second, they insist upon filtering what I am saying through familiar and naturalized concepts of hierarchy until it can only be heard as one form of authoritarianism wishing to replace another. The first reaction of wanting to be told what to do is clearly symptomatic of our immersion within systems of domination such that we can only conceptualize solutions to their oppressions as coming to us in the form of directions. The second issue of insisting that all discourse be reduced to, and judged in relation to, authoritarianism strikes me as a self-defensive impulse intended to preserve the ideological processes that enable one's "normal" social functionality within existing systems of alienation, rather than making oneself emotionally vulnerable to the alienation itself. In identifying these judgments as preconditions of my freelance employment, my chief difficulty is in complicating notions of being open to vulnerability without "openness" being reduced to "anything goes" apathy. How can I present the fact that I find no agency within this employment system - a competitive patronage system many of us here today are contractually dependent upon to one degree or another - as a means of connection and joint investigation with you, as opposed to my being dismissed as a defensive, antagonistic, and ungrateful bastard robbing an academic budget you feel should have been spent differently?

These are the traps before us at this moment. The traps of this professionally crafted response, by which I am simply doing what is expected of me as an employee. It is a performance - a drag show - contributing to an image of free speech and an open exchange of ideas within the framework of this symposium organized by the Fine Art and Design Department. In fact, the more vigorous my critique the more it affirms the graciousness of its object for facilitating said critique. Everything I do or say boils down to "out of order symposia - a matter of principle." Do you see the traps I am talking about? How our personal intentions, our principles, are irrelevant when everything can be reduced to a performance - a reduction that is inevitable when our actions and histories are catalogued and archived by the very systems at issue? These traps are shared by "out of order" fashion in its attempts to conflate runway attacks on taste with political resistance, as its metaphors of struggle become reified and mistaken for struggle itself. My self-sacrificial gestures here today - my apparent openness and vulnerability as a result of risking to say unpopular things in this setting - are not dissimilar to the martyrdom resulting from the development and production of "impractical" and "unwearable" fashion. This is our shared crisis that simultaneously unites and alienates us.

I believe it is vital that we shine light on these aspects of alienation, negativity, impossibility... because to only emphasize the authoritarian "leadership" potential of us and our industries results in a distorted sense of community which all the more excludes and conceals the oppressions binding us together. Such culturally self-serving discourse is the definition of propaganda. It clouds us with the idea that we are assembled here out of "free will" rather than out of class requirements, job requirements, or simply the pressure to keep up with trends. If we cannot confess to these most basic power dynamics underlying our assembly here today, how can we ever hope to produce more complex analyses of our relationships? Although my specialty is not

fashion, the language in the English description for this symposium strikes me as symptomatic of the near fascistic enthusiasm and rivalry forced upon those employed in fashion industries:

As an element of a new and glamorous Celebrity Culture, fashion is one step ahead of other trades and the new-fangled concepts of Creative Industries. [...] Fashion leads the way: Fashion designers, as well as fashion photographers and performers always have been on a quest for disruptions of perception and of production processes. The so called "bad taste" turns glamorous and leads the way for fashion, while the abolition of dress rules turns into a fashion label. Fleeting occurrences and breaches of the established order become the norm. The deviant becomes the new rule.

I know many of you hear these words as I do - a tragic ode to our cooptation, a love poem to capitalist systems of domination, ad copy sound bites defeating content. I feel you choking down your reactions to such positivist language like so many atheists silenced by a swarm of evangelists. I understand that social and economic factors make it so you cannot force up your reactions here and now, but can only bring them up later in private like so much bulimic waste. It is you to whom I am directly speaking when I say, as your sister, I am using my employment here today to bring you a message: You are wasting away. Digest or die.

Endnotes

I did not realize the English synopsis originally provided to me (quoted above) was revised in December 2009 on the Out of Order website (<http://www.outoforder2010.com>). Their final version incorporated a more critical perspective:

One thing seems to be an universally accepted fact in any case: Fashion is ahead of many other industries. In fashion, so called "bad taste" has always become glamorous and a driver of fashion. And the suspension of dress codes has turned into a fashion brand. This way, the transitory and the disruption of established order turn authoritative. Deviation becomes the norm. The imperceptible and capricious dictatce of fashion again and again constitutes itself as a serial cycle that slowly revises tensions and risks that have been created by dissonances. Are there instances where this cycle has been broken, counteracted or revved up too high? The interdisciplinary project "Out of Order" is looking for answers.

Regarding the graphic slide show during my lecture: the images were collected through Google image searches on the terms 'suicide,' 'anorexia,' 'bulimia,' 'anorexic male,' 'IV drug use,' 'crying,' and 'man crying.' They were presented in random order using the Mac OSX slideshow screen saver. This "corporate" (or "institutionalized") assembly and presentation of images (which included both real and faked scenes), and the way in which they could only function within the context of my presentation as a reified and touristic parade alienated from the events the photos documented, was a deliberate parallel to the way in which the themes discussed in my lecture were also subjected to alienation and commodification as a precondition of the symposium format. Unfortunately, issues with English as a second language prohibited many people from being able to follow the speech. As a result, the slide show dominated the experience for many people (as well as became the focus of the Q&A).

The rest of the Q&A was dominated by one particularly optimistic participant (a student, I believe) who felt eating disorders and drug use were no longer problems at all, and that it was inappropriate for me to present such a "negative" presentation to people "trying to change

things." In the absence of help from the moderator to move things forward and open the floor to other participants once her point was made, the Q&A session ended with loud, dead-end cross talk between the participant and I. Although this was one of the only truly "out of order" moments of the symposium, I feel it was unfortunate as I had hoped the post-discussion could have moved into richer territories. While I don't mean to force a "last word" to the disagreement now (particularly after it was suggested that I had abused the power of the stage through the tone of my responses), the point I wished to convey was that there is a difference between action motivated by optimistic desires for things to come ("trying to change things from this point forward"), and action motivated by an urgency to end the unacceptable present ("trying to end things which have persisted until now"). I realize this is a difficult distinction to see, particularly as a young adult coming from an ideological perspective that has been trained to value the power of "dreams" and other optimistic devices, and to de-value a more immediate engagement with the traumas of the present as "negative." (It can take decades for a person to move beyond these dream-based educational philosophies, if at all - they truly coax us into believing a life without dreams can only result in paralysis.) However, I assure you there are other means of mobilization, and for me this difference of perspective was our point of disconnect. Additionally, the social problems mentioned in my talk remain alive, beyond any doubt. The ways in which they become/remain invisible to society at large, and within the fashion industry in particular, are at the core of the processes of alienation and non-disclosure referenced in my lecture.

As if on cue, upon arriving in Germany to deliver this lecture I found the January 2010 edition of *Proud* magazine perfectly illustrating the commodified and populist death wish at issue. Featured designers include H&M, Tribeca, American Apparel, Nicone, Lisa D and others.





Toy gun to the head.

WHITE SUICIDE

Stylist: Nicome
Photographer: Markus Lupfer
Shirt: Myself's own
Shorts: American Apparel
Shoes: H&M



Drug overdose.



Toy IV drug overdose.

Dress: Lisa D
right: stylist's own
shoes: Buffalo



Alcohol or poison.



Pills and alcohol.

dress Nicone
jeans jacket Tribeca
bomber jacket Tiger of Sweden
shoes Kenzo



Shooting oneself.



Hanging oneself.

III

Made in Italy:

All's in Order: "Out of Order" Fashion's Inability to Divest of Power

By Christian Alborz Oldham

In thinking about the language, goals and practice of Sturtevant, it's clear that her methodology has immediate applicability to a number of different industries which share similar exterior traits of production and consumption. If we are to follow Thaemlitz's lead in thinking about the clothing industry, in particular the subsection that is the fashion industry, we find a number of frightening similarities between the loss of meaning and thinking in the production/consumption cycle of clothing, just as in art.

Philosopher Kiyokazu Washida points to the rapid cycle of clothing exhibition, of "new bodily and sexual images," that come and go and come again every six months.³⁷ It's this rapid nature of constant reintroduction and slight alteration that fashion is able to stay true to its own nature, appearing frivolous. With the hyper churn of contemporary cyberspace,³⁸ a Sturtevant-esque portmanteau, the ever-churning expansion and multiplication is clear enough to see unfolding before our eyes. This cyberspace does not simply manufacture to no end: when a saturation point has been met, product overflows, and capitalism's next move is to turn from manufacturing more products to ultimately manufacturing desire itself.

While fashion is being pushed forth by cyberspace's game, it tricks itself into thinking that it's in control. "Driven from behind by the absolute imperative of constantly producing new desire, Fashion mistakenly becomes hooked on the idea that it fuels desire by itself."³⁹ Nothing is immune to this drive, even so-called punk.

And what of consumers? They have changed buying habits and attention spans to accord with this breakneck speed. "...Desire is something that must be aroused before it is felt."⁴⁰ Real pleasure has been discarded, or rather, has not been given the time of day, as desire is not allowed to mature. Before this maturation can take place, the next desire is already here with its foot in the door. In this constant state of turnover, desire is numbed, which then becomes thirst for thought of want, or just the feeling of want itself, absent of the interior.

It's clear in this whole process that critical thoughts regarding provenance of material, shape, function, and labor production are pushed to the back, which speeds up the manufacturing process, sublimates guilt, and forces forgetfulness—everything is novel to an audience that willingly forgets. Fashion's churn is an interminable parade that "mimics the role of the 'present' in the story of time. Fashion packages the age according to a specific image, proclaiming that 'now' is an age of this kind of movement or that kind of atmosphere. And before the packaging is even complete, Fashion is already abandoning its proclamations and moving on."⁴¹

Emphasizing "now" is a hypothetical point between that which is always in the past and that which is always coming. As "now" images move to be accessible at all price points, sizes, materials, and locations, people speak of democratization in the realms of cyberfashion. While one argues a reproduction at any quality offers egalitarian access, here it should be made clear

³⁷ Yohji Yamamoto, Nick Knight, Peter Lindbergh, and Kiyokazu Washida, *Talking to Myself*, Edited by Carla Sozzani (Steidl Verlag, 2002), 300.

³⁸ A portmanteau between Sturtevant's concept of cybernetics which she defines as, "speed, information, and access" and capitalism, signifying a capitalism in overdrive.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 301

that although the products may carry a similar shape, production differences in quality make this an apples and oranges fallacy. The exterior image stays the same, but this repeat holds a compromised interiority, if any at all.

John Graham Brooks, a lecturer in political economics from the 19th century, attempts to make a connection between consumerism and social justice by promoting the production of high-quality merchandise. This production is meant to assist in ameliorating working conditions through the promotion of more conscientious buying. “Good shopping practices would ‘stimulate the production of better and more honest products,’ and by extension, stimulate ‘the improved conditions of labor that usually accompany better workmanship.’ The key to Brooks’s thinking is the assumption that good workmanship goes hand in hand with satisfactory working conditions, with the former in fact bringing about the latter rather than vice versa.”⁴² The aim of this stance is to perhaps see a rise in cost with an equal or exponential expanse in use and utility, thus reducing consumption overall, impeding cybercapitalism. It’s of importance to note the writing of Brooks coincides with the rise of industrialism and mechanical reproduction, far before the situation we find ourselves in today.

Where we are now, we can see which argument decidedly overtook the landscape of western economics. Unfortunately, this opinion of handcrafted production and consumption is near obsolete and in contemporary life carries with it an elitist or classist undertone, with Thorstein Veblen, economist and sociologist, noting that the production of special edition books that require hand-labor are more expensive and less convenient to users as compared to their rapidly produced and cost-effective counterparts. Whereas the latter inspires and invites use, the former places value and fetishized labor as the primary objective. “Books ‘printed on hand-laid deckle-edged paper, with excessive margins and uncut leaves’ exhibit an ‘elaborate ineptitude.’ A limited edition, he concludes, succeeds merely in achieving scarcity, costliness, and ‘pecuniary distinction to its consumer.’ In short, such limited editions merely pander to the existing market economy.”⁴³ It’s perhaps also significant that Veblen, within this situation that concerns itself with utility and accessibility, was the one to give “conspicuous consumption,” or dressing to your societal class, its name.

Today, due to the second-hand marketplaces, we find accessibility to a wider range of clothes, both digitally and physically, than was ever possible before. These marketplaces do two things: trades “fashion” for “clothing” that deals less with the “now” in the socially agreed sense, meaning one may find in fact that “now” borrows from “then”; secondly, Veblen’s conspicuous consumption becomes muddied upon meeting post-modernity, where these marketplaces allow access to garments from essentially every price point and class level where the main limiting factor to access is time spent searching—dressing has become class collage.

However, these points in themselves raise troubling concerns. One instance of what often comes of access to second-hand marketplaces is a shortsighted reframing, or perhaps to others, an

⁴² Anne Rorimer, "Michael Asher: His Work at The Renaissance Society, Chicago," *Afterall*, 2002, <https://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.1/michael.asher.his.work.renaissance.society.chicago>.

⁴³ Ibid.

insensitivity, to class and labor uniforms featured in sites of manual labor.⁴⁴ The co-optation of these garments, or garments of similar familiarity, then become status symbols for fashionable youth. For example, Carhartt branded clothing one finds on construction sites, farms, ranches, among other locales. Over time, these garments have become popular with young people who find what these farmhands, ranchers, and construction workers no longer use and donate to second-hand resellers.

While there is the benefit of the continued use of what is most likely irresponsibly made clothing, at least when it comes to textile production and/or fair labor practices, there's also the illumination of the discrepancy between the Carhartt company as a for-profit venture and its so-called "responsibility" to its customers. In response to this rise in youth-interest in their company, Carhartt releases small collections of garments that are produced in collaboration with young fashion designers for continued interest by this burgeoning market. Simultaneously, the company also engages in other ventures that stand in support for the American military, most likely in ideological opposition to the youth-market they cater to.

Corporations, that are now legally recognized as individuals, more and more, attempt to take on anthropomorphic traits and practices of their target customers as a means of identifying with them on ideological levels. Sometimes this is enacted through what is called "corporate social responsibility" (or CSR) that takes form through certain sponsorships or associations with charities or ecological organizations, sometimes even promoting certain "fair" labor practices. CSR has become a more normalized practice as time has gone on, most likely due to the neo-liberal social belief that businesses should be run with profit not being the only motivating factor for C-level executives. If it is any indication of the dissonant practices that a company such as Carhartt participates in, CSR is often used as a smokescreen and public relations tactic to increase public reception of a brand. After all, the definition of a company has not changed—its interests are commercial with a primary fiscal responsibility to their stakeholders.

These concerns over the "social responsibility" of a given company challenge the moral and ethical standing of many corporations across industries. The clothing re-sale market, whether occupied by a charitable organization or a profit-driven corporation, falls within this territory of dubiousness. The customer is complicit. To think that conscious shopping at a second-hand market absolves one of the sins of labor or resource exploitation that comes with clothing production is shortsighted. As much as one tries, it is impossible to not help in the assisting of any sort deleterious production by even being seen wearing clothing. By being public, at a party, or disseminating a photograph of what one is wearing, consumptive image production is taking place, which can then snowball into the production of any such garment that only exists due to exploitation on any given level of the clothing supply-chain.

Thinking that a large, public-facing second-hand marketplace⁴⁵ is awkward simply because of its redistribution and sale of problematic wares is also forgetting that the corporate structuring and

⁴⁴ Let it be known that this is by no means a call for national uniforms or something as equally oppressive as what is already in state.

⁴⁵ As compared to, say, a small re-sale boutique whose main goal is clearly based upon a profit-making model.

ideological positioning⁴⁶ of these organizations allows for even larger problems that are sanctioned by governing bodies.⁴⁷ For example, the 990 tax filings of 501(c)(3) organizations is such that while it lists the incomes of top-ranking individuals within the group, does not have any breakdown on the discrepancies between money earned and the money expended on the actual mission of the organization.

Thaemlitz's characterization of for-profit companies that, "donate a fraction of a percentage to some mainstream charity hemorrhaging with administrative overhead,"⁴⁸ is also quite often found to be the case, whether it's a clothing related venture or not. It is disturbing when companies that are privately held corporations mislead customers into believing their missions are largely charitable when the financial reality is otherwise. This often misleads donors to divert their goods from actual charities run by volunteers to a profit driven company being purposefully vague.⁴⁹ Not that the volunteer run charity is not without its own misgivings, of course.

These second-hand marketplaces rely upon cyberfashion production—among other forms of garment production, of course—to keep stores filled. However, arguably, they're as reliant on

⁴⁶ For example, The Salvation Army is a faith-based organization that engages in social welfare and evangelism. Historically they have been criticized for actively discriminating against lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, and queer peoples by referring individuals to conversion therapy groups and resisting the need to extend domestic benefits to same-sex partners of employees. Chuck Stewart, *Gay and Lesbian Issues: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 44.

Sunnivie Brydum, "Salvation Army 'Does Not Consider Homosexual Orientation a Sin.'" *Advocate*, November 27, 2013, <https://www.advocate.com/business/2013/11/27/salvation-army-does-not-consider-homosexual-orientation-sin/>, March 5, 2018.

⁴⁷ One only needs to look at companies such as Goodwill Industries which over the years has faced controversy over over-paying its presidents of local branches and paying disabled employees less than the minimum wage under the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 that states that with "special wage certificates" organizations can pay workers with disabilities a wage based upon performance evaluations. Bryan Denon and Jeff Kosseff, "Goodwill chief agrees to pay cut – National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy," National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, December 20, 2005, Accessed March 4, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110304215552/http://www.ncrp.org/news-room/news-2005/402-goodwill-chief-agrees-to-pay-cut>.

John Hrabe, "Policies, tax dollars enrich Goodwill execs | National | watchdog.org," Watchdog, May 6, 2013, Accessed March 4, 2018, https://www.watchdog.org/national/policies-tax-dollars-enrich-goodwill-execs/article_7e117259-609a-5ea1-a144-de3ef58734c9.html.

In Derek Jarman's *Blue*, a film comprising of a single International Klein Blue screen sonically overlaid with a series of monologues comprised of Jarman's poetry and autobiographical narrative surrounding his life with AIDS, says, "Charity has allowed the uncaring to appear to care and is terrible for those dependent on it. It has become big business as the government shirks its responsibilities in these uncaring times. We go along with this, so the rich and powerful who fucked us over once fuck us over again and get it both ways. We have always been mistreated, so if anyone gives us the slightest sympathy we overreact with our thanks." Derek Jarman, *Blue*, directed by Derek Jarman, narrated by John Quentin, Derek Jarman, Nigel Terry, and Tilda Swinton (1993; Basalisk Communications Ltd., 1993).

⁴⁸ Terre Thaemlitz, "Terre Thaemlitz – Writings – All's in Order," Comatonse, January 27, 2010, <http://www.comatonse.com/writings/allsinorder.html>.

⁴⁹ As is the case with Savers, or as is known in the Pacific Northwest, Value Village, a privately owned clothing-resale company held by two investment groups, Leonard Green & Partners and TPG Capital. In 2015 Savers/Vallue Village was filed suit against by the Minnesota Attorney General for misleading the public over perceived charitable giving that was not substantiated with available financial information. Francesca Lyman, "The Thrift Store Chain That Dressed Up Like A Charity And Got Sued | InvestigateWest," InvestigateWest, October 28, 2015, Accessed March 5, 2018, <http://www.invw.org/2015/10/28/the-thrift-store-chain-that-dressed-up-like-a-charity-and-got-sued/>.

cyberfashion as they are on death, changing seasons, wear and tear, periodic purging, amongst other variables. These marketplaces are perhaps just a suggestive response to the question of where egalitarian style and access lies, if anywhere. While it has been shown time and time again that one will find better made, better fabric, and better value than anything one can buy from a cheap cyberfashion retailer today, this is not the end all be all of consumption, let alone the wearing of garments, as the mere perception of these garments inherently leads to power inequity.

That being said, complete divestment of power within our current society is an ideal. So what does it mean to actively strive towards an impossible goal? As Thaemlitz suggests, striving for this unreachable goal is perhaps to, “[recognize] one's own placement in a moment of crisis from which all directions are traps, and to then leave oneself vulnerable to crisis. As a member of the audio-activist collective Ultra-red recently wrote me, ‘once confronted with that crisis (the crisis of one's alienation), then one either enters into it to see what can be learned, or one retreats (aggressively) to the very modes of being that affirm and nurture the alienation.’”⁵⁰ If one can't escape the noxious politics of clothing production and the innumerable transactions that take place within that industry, let alone the power that is inherently linked to every single garment and every single permutation of a collection of garments that constitutes an outfit, then where does one go from here?⁵¹

⁵⁰ Terre Thaemlitz, “Terre Thaemlitz – Writings – All’s in Order,” Comatonse, January 27, 2010, <http://www.comatonse.com/writings/allsinorder.html>.

⁵¹ I can think of two artist examples of alternative societies that reconsider the flow of goods that include clothing. The first comes from an interview with filmmaker Jack Smith by literary critic Sylvère Lotringer. Smith says:

JS: I can think of other types of societies... Like in the middle of the city should be a repository of objects that people don't want anymore, which they would take to this giant junkyard. That would form an organization, a way that the city would be organized... the city organized around that. I think this center of unused objects and unwanted objects would become a center of intellectual activity. Things would grow up around it

SL: You mean some sort of center of exchange?

JS: Yes, there could be exchange, that would start to develop. You take anything that you don't want and don't want to throw out and just take it to this giant place, and just leaving it and looking for something that you need...

Jack Smith and Sylvère Lotringer, “Uncle Fishhook and The Sacred Baby Poo Poo of Art,” in *Hatred of Capitalism: A Semiotext(e) Reader*, ed. Chris Kraus and Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 2002).

The other example, directly pertaining to that of clothing via a total reforming of architecture that is only comprised of compressed air, comes from artist Yves Klein in his *Project for an Architecture of Air*:

... The air roof regulates the temperature and, at the same time, protects that privileged area.

Ground surface of transparent glass.

Subterranean service zone (kitchens, bathrooms, storage, and utility rooms).

The principle of privacy, still present in our world, has vanished in this city, which is bathed in light and completely open to the outside.

A new atmosphere of human intimacy prevails.

The inhabitants live in the nude.

The primitive patriarchal structure of the family no longer exists.

The community is perfect, free, individualistic, impersonal.

The principle activity of the inhabitants: leisure...

Sturtevant's work relies directly on the association to meaningful, and thus, powerful objects and images of the past in order to illuminate the entire industrial structure that allows her work, or any work, for that matter, to be shown. Rather than what Thaemlitz calls for, being a divestment of power, Sturtevant economically manipulates and uses structures, signs and symbols already culturally affixed. What often seems to be a critical voice coming through the work she was making, presenting, and wanting us to consider, is less about wanting to talk about a world that could be—and more about talking about the world we are in now. The belief in absolutism in any axiomatic field of knowledge is frankly, a suspension of disbelief. Sturtevant, rather than wishing the world of image reception, production, and consumption be an absolute of a different kind, is more interested in pointing out and participating within its intricate hypocrisies.

However, work that is directly critical, or flirts with criticism, has become an acceptable type of art-making. The acceptability, granted by institutions such as art magazines, commercial galleries, collecting and non-collecting museums, among others, is reminiscent of the co-optation of the punk style by mall brands, in other words what is originally counterculture becomes: replicable, standardized, institutionally sanctioned, neutered. The systems that allow non-threatening critical art to be endorsed and exhibited permits a tolerable limitation to promote the positivist, neo-liberal illusion of the possibility of institutional change.⁵²

Clothing—its manufacture and its point of distribution and sale—is an apt illustration for the faults and entrapment of contemporary productive society as it relates to human and ecological rights and wellbeing. Artworks, like those produced by Sturtevant, are in place that manipulate readymade power⁵³ and in doing so, point to the total structures that allow that very artwork to be shown.⁵⁴ The fact that this work is given an immense public platform and standing in financial markets throws into question the efficacy of the artworks pointing⁵⁵ and makes one aware of the very real possibility of criticism becoming capital. With this knowledge, what does it mean to be making work that disconcertingly falls within this potential cycle of critical production, which is largely similar and toxic to many other types of artistic production. When and how does model-building for alternative ways of living and producing stop being a type of Stockholm Syndrome, and become a practical and viable reality?

⁵² On the hopes of waiting: “The surest way to rule is to infect others with waiting. This renders them completely harmless and motionless. The deception of waiting is harder than any prison and stronger than any chains. With some luck and skill, one can scale prison walls, but one can never escape from the deception of waiting. Everything you know and are capable of is put in service of this endless waiting, which occurs without hope and without end. Some waste their whole lives, tortured by this aimlessness, while others get everything without waiting at all. Enslaved by waiting, they sometimes give the appearance of resistance, heroic struggles, victories, and new goals and futures. But they merely utter the words that once moved them to action.” Ivo Andrić, *Notebooks 1942-1974, Collected Works, Vol. 17*, trans. Irena Haiduk (Udruženi Izdavaci: Svjetlost, Prosveta, Mladost, Državna Zalozba Slovenije, Misla, Pobjeda, 1981), 220-223.

⁵³ As in, signs and signifiers of a priori power and value like already existing artworks.

⁵⁴ In her searing treatise of “polite art,” or work that is institutionally sanctioned, Irena Haiduk says, “Polite art points. It points at things that stand out. Hasn’t your mother taught you it’s rude to point? Pointing is only good for assassinations and picking groceries. Which one? That one. / Which one? This one. / This one? The one on the right. / Are you sure? Yes.” Irena Haiduk, *Bon Ton Mais Non* (Arandelovac, Serbia, 2013), 27-31.

⁵⁵ Unless of course its ideological undermining and financial salability is intended to be a part of how the work functions—but—even then, that seems a bit unsatisfactory.

IV

Putting the theory to the test

In describing their reality-disorienting performance art beauty pageants, the Canadian art-trio General Idea say: "The 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant is basically this: A framing device we have framed for our own devices to contain our frame-ups. The search for the spirit of Miss General Idea is the ritualized pageant of creation, production, selection, presentation, competition, manipulation, and revelation of that which is suitable for framing."⁵⁶ That is to say through all the humorous and dizzying tautology, in creating their own version of a common 1970s cultural institution such as the beauty pageant, the group have decided to forego subverting the established norm by proposing their own alternative, which fulfills their needs and desires.⁵⁷

I raise this point as an introduction to speaking about my own work, particularly regarding my forays into thinking about clothing as a functional saleable item produced as part of a larger supply chain—and—object of preservation and variable value. The format many of these projects often find themselves contained within can be identified as alternative forms of micro-institutions.⁵⁸ One such project is a PDF file of images and descriptive text of clothing that is periodically distributed via e-mail. The e-mail specifies that the images within the PDF are objects that are for sale and anyone interested in acquiring them can bid in a way reminiscent of a virtual silent auction or even an early version of eBay. In attempting to describe what this process is, does, or suggests, my friend Sam Kuhn recently wrote at length his thoughts in an e-mail to me:

I feel like a big part of your practice is questioning and re-defining the context in which art exists to allow art to have a place within certain 'uncertain' virtual social / economic spaces, i.e. sending all your friends a catalogue of wares for sale -- Is this art? Is this spring cleaning? Is this an opportunity to export an aesthetic to a social network and 'influence' a group who's only social tie is you? Is this generosity? Is this something that will ever be written about or exist outside of the assumed personal and private space of 'e-mail'? Is this the art of the catalogue? Is the art the act of purchase? Is the art the acquisition and curation of clothing? Is this art or life? -- a lot of new questions are opened by the activities or performances you do even in narrow nearly private contexts. I would say its safe to say you're also philosophizing art and eroding a 'life' and 'art' binary through disruptive but not destructive, ultimately humor filled gestures, that operate within the unknown or yet unwritten quietly assumed ethics of digital life. Also: I think you're charting out or at least aiming to chart out an equitable share relationship with your patron, consumer, friend -- like a shop owner you are gifting certain quantities i.e. music playlists and then charging for others i.e. clothing to create a beneficent and generous art practice that feels built upon good business sense (are you familiar with the practice of lagniappe?). I think your relationship to business and

⁵⁶ General Idea, *Pilot*, directed by Richard Johnson, performed by General Idea (1977; Ontario: Electronics Art Intermix), DVD.

⁵⁷ In participating in a type of institutional mitosis (or, alternatively, to continue the cellular metaphor, mutation), the question arises as to whether this self-reconstruction and perpetuation of particular cultural mechanisms is an act of liberation or a continuation of the oppression the group faces. However, in proposing the latter, one is reminded of the group's admonition in the same video that they, "wanted to be famous...wanted to glamorous and...wanted to be rich". That, and the group had published, years before, a 16mm video work entitled *God is My Gigolo*, perhaps openly suggesting that the group knowingly participates and enacts exploitation upon itself for its own means.

⁵⁸ Micro- in the sense that these "institutions" only apply to my own individual projects. And they remain in the general (although non-standardized) format of institutions because rather than critiquing existing institutions I produce my own for my own selfish needs. As to whether this activity falls into the above-said trap of continuing my own oppression, I'd have to assume so.

commerce is inextricable from your art practice and furthermore the unwritten structuring of transactional invitations seems to suggest an avant garde approach to business strategy.⁵⁹

Many of the questions asked were considered in the recent iteration of this project⁶⁰, entitled *Tales of the Benevolent Cosmic Flea Market*. The art-event-indeterminacy and lack of place, aside from one's e-mail inbox, have over time become conscious considerations. The way communication follows when a bid is placed is clunky. Not only do individuals have to send messages through e-mail—but then receive updates as to when their bids are outmaneuvered, following with the question asking if they would like to proceed with another bid. Financial details, as it pertains to bidding history, is organized in an excel spreadsheet. Human error and willful manipulation sometimes takes place. While there are general rules of engagement written out in the e-mail, my willingness to break rules or to have suggested alternatives on the part of the engager is not out of the question.⁶¹

The e-mail is sent to roughly 300 individuals. This number grows with each occurrence, as strangers, recipients due to their being forwarded the e-mail by their friends, get added onto the list. The parameters of these individuals is diverse and there is no particular focus on any one variable that decides who does or does not receive the mail. In this most recent iteration, price for an item was in no way indicated or suggested. Additionally, no offers were refused.

What has been of most interest to me in enacting this piece is the action of liquidation and parsing out the uncanny distinction in the language between modern day business finance and the proto-scientific query of alchemy. When one speaks of “liquidity” or “liquid assets” in business finance terms, they speak of the ability of an asset to be turned back into cash, or just cash itself sitting in the bank. The visual metaphor is that money in a bank account is a liquid that then transmogrifies into a solid through the act of purchasing.⁶² Alchemy, in its tireless search for transmuting lesser materials into gold or other unobtanium, through this process of transmogrification, disconcertingly sounds like an antiquated metaphor for “making something out of nothing” in today’s entrepreneurial ventures within America’s free-market economy under capitalism. Within that amoral framework, “hard work” and “determination” are described as the limiting factors to someone’s success in America, irresponsibly disregarding the reality of material social conditions. Entrepreneurs, a participant and common exploiter of the amoral business landscape, are touched upon in Cady Noland’s essay, *Towards a Metalanguage of Evil*, where she says, “Ethel Spector Person, in her brilliant essay, MANIPULATIVENESS IN ENTREPRENEURS AND PSYCHOPATHS, suggests that the psychopath shares the societally sanctioned characteristics of the entrepreneurial male. Their maneuvers are differentiated mostly by decibel, the acts of the psychopath being the ‘louder’.”⁶³ I am aware that in the process of displaying this artwork I run the risk of conducting business in a typical entrepreneurial, or, rather, psychopathic, and unethical manner. However, my utter disinterest in price gouging and

⁵⁹ Sam Kuhn, e-mail message to author, November 11, 2017.

⁶⁰ As now this is its fifth occurrence.

⁶¹ For example, desiring to use an alternative form of currency that is not money. No one has questioned the method and medium of transaction yet.

⁶² Liquidation is its opposite, where an asset becomes liquid.

⁶³ Cady Noland, *Towards a Metalanguage of Evil* (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1992), 6-7.

primary fascination with the wildly different conceptions of determining a goods' value should suggest a larger interest in individual relationships to capital and commodity.

Filmmaker Jack Smith, in his interview *Uncle Fishhook and the Sacred Baby Poo Poo of Art*, says,

Buying and selling is the most natural human institution: there's nothing wrong with that...
Buying and selling is the most interesting thing in the world. It should be aesthetic and everything else. But capitalism is a perversion of this. Nothing is more wonderful than a marketplace. It gives people something to do...and it can be creative. Wonderful things come from commerce...but not from capitalism...⁶⁴

Historical currencies have come in the form of capital goods and utilitarian commodities such as services (including that of slavery), plants, livestock, shells, rocks, grains, metals, tools, weapons, raw materials, property, clothing, adornments, oral stories, household wares, among other types of objects gathered or crafted by human labor. Transactions, including such actions as bartering or trading, have taken place for more than 10,000 years going far back into pre-history.

Over the centuries, the majority of these types of interactions, which in some cases still take place today, happen on a small scale, usually between people, face to face.⁶⁵ Now, some of the goods found in marketplaces today are imported from overseas. This is the result of trade deals that have matured and been renegotiated over the past several hundred years between nations of varying distances, economies, populations, and resources. The concern with this type of trading, on an international level in comparison to that of a domestic one, is that equivalences of goods that inherently have abstract values have been determined.

Defining value is a creative act that has been happening for as long as transactions have existed, for how else does one establish the equivalency between that of cows and sheep. Whereas a trade for cows and sheep might make sense on a micro-level, where the farmers have mutually agreed that one is in need of wool and the other milk, the macro-level begins to grow complicated as one is dealing with countries who, for example, treat their citizens, and thus working class, either humanely or inhumanely depending on the legal safeguards set in place for their protection or exploitation. How can monetary value and equivalency be determined when differences in moral and human rights values internationally are so contrasting?

Some determiners of an objects valuation and equivalency, as it relates to art making, are the institutions of the museum and that of Art History. In 2013, art dealer Seth Siegelaub posed the question as to whether Art History ultimately is just a history of the market. On a similar note, artist Michael Asher, having conducted a work for the Museum of Modern Art's 1999 exhibition *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*, presented a publication of all of the museum's deaccessioned artworks. Asher grew interested in these artworks because many things were happening in the sale of this art. In an interview with Stephan Pascher, Asher explains,

⁶⁴ Jack Smith and Sylvère Lotringer, "Uncle Fishhook and The Sacred Baby Poo Poo of Art".

⁶⁵ Although arguably most transactions today are digital and removed from bodily and social interaction.

I was responding to the myth of the Museum of Modern Art, how the museum is thought of as the preeminent museum of classical modernism—that it represents many of the canonical modernist art objects. I had so many questions...about this construction. Particularly at this point in time, how could there be a canon really, after all we have been through, and what we have seen? But of course, what we learn in school is that there is a canon. The problem with this way of thinking is that it doesn't allow for any other possibilities. So one way of approaching the exhibition was to try to determine in what ways the museum had built the canon. It seemed to me necessary to look into the ways the museum transferred works of art into and out of the collection—whether the canon resulted from the piecing together of works acquired over the years, or rather, whether the canon was actually shaped through a process of deacquisition, or deaccession as well.⁶⁶

Pascher suggests that by having authority over the canon, that the museum is able to manipulate the market, to which Asher says,

Absolutely. One of the reasons I wanted to do this work was that I wanted to propose the idea that the museum is very involved in the market, not only by offering models of what ideal forms of production look like, but also by deaccessioning works of art—selling or exchanging art objects, by which they gain income or other works for art. For me, 403 works from 1929 to the present....For me, it's quite a few.⁶⁷

Pascher then suggests there is a historical aspect, being, the manipulation of history itself and the ability to write artists out of the history book or canon altogether. Asher responds saying,

There are so many unanswered questions here, and I don't know how to answer them. But I agree...everything within the museum does substantiate the artist's market. In the case of contemporary art, the market has been a shortsighted measure of those artworks that have made a contribution to the practice of art production. In an exhibition such as *The Museum as Muse*, MoMA selects artists who are recognized to have market value. Such a process, not limited to the Museum of Modern Art, produces and reproduces cultural and economic stability...I mean, I would like to say that from my own experience, and what I sometimes think about, is that [art is] about something other than money...But this museum experience doesn't make me believe it's divorced from economic exchange. And that's unfortunate.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Michael Asher, Stephan Pascher, "Interview with Michael Asher on the Occasion of The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1999)," in *Michael Asher*, ed. Jennifer King (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016), 130.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 136.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 137-138.

Asher additionally goes on to explain he also was indirectly thinking about the working class as it relates to the acquisition and deaccession of works of art by museums. He says,

...their labor was responsible for generating enough profits for company owners to purchase art. Gifts to museums are often the result of these purchases. Once these works of art become public—that is, part of a museum collection—they become part of the culture of that community, and when institutions deaccession a work or sell it off, they are taking it away from that community—removing it from the consciousness of the community to which the works have become valued possessions. And that's a speculation, but I really think it's true, that people have a close bond and relationship with these works of art, not only due to their own labor, but due to the fact that they live in these communities. And the works become a part of the communities, and that's why it's very hard to unglue them and why there is opposition...Don't forget that the museum—I have the feeling at times—thinks that the public can forget really easily. So they find it very easy to change things around and tell different histories...You can't expect people to forget. It becomes a part of

This situation of the intimately related institutions of the art museum and Art History, in relation to their association with the market as economic stabilizers, perhaps throws into question the critical legitimacy of the work contained within their buildings and histories. One only needs to look at the board members of a number of iconic American art institutions and the industries they represent, to begin to see a relationship between art production and exhibition and its affiliation to standard growth economics.⁶⁹ The speed and size at which public institutions are expected to provide programming—of exhibitions, lectures, guided tours, performances, etc.—is perhaps not unlike the aforementioned Kiyokazu Washida’s notes on rapid fashion production and Sturtevant’s belief that current art is a desiring machine. It’s most likely the makeup of these boards, and the industrial histories, expertise, and proclivities of its individual members, that propels the museum industry—for the operation of it is now not so different from the running of a clothing or car manufacturer in speed or size. However, perpetual growth is unrealistic and unsustainable—sometimes it feels like it’s forgotten that market rises are met with falls and crashes. In speaking to the shortcomings of art’s complicity to economic growth and expansion, Irena Haiduk writes, “Polite art wants to live, multiply, and grow. Plus not minus. Once something grows too big it’s no longer agile. Growth takes up space. Growth has coordinates but no position. Growth has an address. It can be stalked and hunted down.”⁷⁰

In discussing notions of growth, speed, and value—all powers and traits of modern institutions—what can be gained by my cataloguing of my garments and creation of my own institution? Initially, the motivator for this creation was driven by Sturtevant and Aby Warburg’s idea of depicting images, either made, in the case of Sturtevant, or found and indexed, in the case of Warburg. Both figures have a goal of portraying origin, or at least stimulating thought in a viewer to actively consider the concerns surrounding production and dissemination of images

their knowledge. We have to understand that things that are on view are part of the circulation of knowledge and you can’t take people’s knowledge away from them without them questioning it.

Ibid., 139-140.

⁶⁹ Andre Fraser in 2011’s *L’1%, C’est Moi*, lists a number of individuals, at the time, present on the boards of American art institutions alongside their dubious financial actions and associations. She writes,

MoMA, MoCA, and LACMA trustee Eli Broad is worth \$5.8 billion and was a board member and major shareholder of AIG...Guggenheim trustee Dimitris Daskalopoulos, who is also chairmen of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises, recently called for ‘modern private initiative’ to save the failing Greek economy from a ‘bloated and parasitic’ ‘patronage-ridden state’...Guggenheim trustee David Ganek recently shut down his \$4 billion Level Global hedge fund after an F.B.I. raid...Henry Kravis’ income in 2007 was reported to be \$1.3 million a day. His wife, economist Marie-Josée Kravis, who is MoMA’s president and a fellow at the neoconservative Hudson Institute, recently defended ‘Anglo-Saxon capitalism’ against ‘Europe’s “social capitalist politics”’ in Forbes.com. Daniel S. Loeb, a MoCA trustee and founder of the \$7.8 billion hedge fund Third Point, sent a letter to investors in the midst of recent federal budget negotiations that led the US to the brink of default, attacking Obama for ‘insisting that the only solution to the nation’s problems...lies in the redistribution of wealth’ (the negotiations concluded with drastic cuts and no tax increases)...The firm of MoMA chairman Jerry Speyer defaulted on a major real estate investment in 2010, losing \$500 million for the California State Pension Fund and up to \$2 billion in debt secured by US federal agencies...

Andrea Fraser, “L’1%, C’est Moi,” *Texte Zer Kunst*, no. 83 (2011).

⁷⁰ Irena Haiduk, *Bon Ton Mais Non*, 57-62.

and information. In some sense, this project of mine is a continuation of these ideas, focusing particularly on clothing rather than that of art or antiquity.⁷¹

Just as Sturtevant's work relied on the audience's knowledge of her particular linguistic philosophy in order to decipher her readings and writings, or needed to be familiar with the works of Warhol, Beuys, or Johns to realize her artistic devices, establishing a firm context for the sartorial field, an inundated one at that for objects and histories, is crucial. Warburg provides some framework by borrowing indiscriminately from contemporary news sources, paintings, and other topical media to compare alongside antiquity, in some sense, guiding the viewer back through what may be reverse chronology for them.

This archive is a website primarily comprised of photographs and will be stored on a local-server. By being on a local server, it means that the site itself can only be visited in the location that the server is present, which will be my place of residence. When the site opens one is met with a text list of all garments, described by various attributes, such as garment type, country of manufacture, marked size, fabric composition, fabric production/treatment, closure type, era of manufacture, and designer name. If the garment is still present in the wardrobe, one can click through to find images of the piece lain flat on a white background, and see front, back, and internal views.⁷² If someone would like to perform a search of various attributes, perhaps to find a 100% cotton jacket, made in Vietnam, the tagging system designed for the website allows for multi-pronged searches.

There have been many considerations made to the method of viewing this website. It's site specificity and status of being offline greatly truncates its distribution and visibility. Garments photographed in such a high-quality manner borders on object fetishism and in a sense becomes pornographic. Allowing these images, that may be described as luscious, to freely disseminate is detrimental as it strips it of its context and becomes an image to desire, void of any meaning. Susan Sontag, in an interview with Rolling Stone in 1979 says,

The nature of modern communication systems is that anything can be said, any context is equivalent to any other context, so that things can be placed in many different contexts at the same time, like photography. But there's something profoundly compromising about that situation. Of course, it allows for a liberty of action and consciousness that people have never had before. But it means that you can't keep original or profound meanings intact because inevitably they're disappointed, adulterated, transformed, and transmuted. So, when you launch an idea for a fantasy or a theme or an image to the world, it has this tremendous career that you can't possibly control or limit. You want to share things with other people, but on the other hand you don't want to just feed the machine that needs millions of fantasies and objects and products and opinions to be fed into it every day in order to keep on going. And that's perhaps a reason one is tempted to be silent sometimes.⁷³

⁷¹ While I don't believe in a distinction between any of these modes of production, I understand that markets and society at large do, hence my differentiation.

⁷² If the garment is not in my possession anymore, because of giving away or sale, the listing is deleted and the text appears with a strikethrough. If the garment is not in my possession for being in storage, it is still available for viewing online. If a garment is on the site and in my possession, it can be brought out for wear and research.

⁷³ Jonathan Cott, *Susan Sontag: The Complete Rolling Stone Interview* (USA: Yale University Press, 2013), 121-122.

The only possibility of seeing this project is by directly knowing me or through a referral. While I understand criticisms of enacting exclusion in how this work doesn't distribute readily, it should be known that I am quite inviting and warm in conversation, more than happy to share with anyone who pursues to see the work, but entirely uninterested in standard growth economics.

That being said, my primary interest in having this project be so driven by location allows it certain traits. One is that it places emphasis on the orality of the situation. Garments and their make-up are understood through conversing, and the specificity of the information can grow or diminish as it's dependent on my own memory and research, and the time allowed and depth of information desired by the participant.

In this discussion of a garment's provenance, in all of its dimensions, I'm aware that the rules and codes of clothing production span multiple anthropological and global histories, let alone centuries of human and technological development. It's safe to assume that every part of every garment has a storied lineage. Much of my time is spent researching and expanding my knowledge about textile, yarn, dye, and garment production, and this informs my understanding of the garments present in the wardrobe. However, there are of course shortcomings. In trying to depict where the origins of formal elements come from onto contemporaneous garments will find me in a situation trying to grapple with the reality of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*, or, historically effected consciousness. Hans Georg Gadamer, hermeneutic scholar⁷⁴ and founder of this term, suggests that it's of great import to ask, "whether it is correct to see understanding as a second creation, the reproduction of the original production. Ultimately, this view of hermeneutics is as nonsensical as all restitution and restoration of past life."⁷⁵ The way in which we can attempt to resolve this issue is by understanding that the ever-continuing past of the sartorial object and our ever-constructing post-modern present can only reconcile so far. What Gadamer calls the *horizontverschmelzung*, or fusion of horizons, helps when one realizes that, "the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired... *Understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.*"⁷⁶

To be accessible solely through in-person appointment is to create a discontinuous relationship between this particular micro-grouping of clothing and that of larger collecting institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art's textiles department, which does similar types of research and documentation. However, this project, in seeking to create a micro-institution, invites the viewing public to critically consider the power that institutions, such as this very project and the MET, have in creating and crafting particular histories of objects. More importantly, how these particular histories can effect, both positively and negatively, the historicization, cultural, and economic value of certain forms over others. Additionally, this micro-institution seeks to promote critical engagement of consumer culture and exploration into the various realities of these sartorial objects as informed by history. In some sense, hoping to inspire thought, like Sturtevant and Warburg, and perhaps bring about historically effected consumerism.

⁷⁴ Hermeneutics is the theory and study of how we interpret signs and symbols, including that of language.

⁷⁵ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Coopers Row, (London: Sheed and Ward Ltd, 1993), 167.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 306.

Whereas the archive project seeks to create an institution for the purpose of critical thinking surrounding institutional mission and site, the piece entitled *Two Families of Time and Their Enemies Never and Always* uses its site, the Henry Art Gallery, a collecting art institution located in Seattle, Washington, as a reference point and framing device for its very existence.

The piece is comprised of two parts within the Henry. There is no distinction between the pieces in their titling, but rather their materials. One of the works lists its materials as: fumigated acorn banksia, fumigated beehive ginger, fumigated bird of paradise, fumigated chocolate cosmos, fumigated cotton, fumigated feverfew, fumigated flax, fumigated peony fumigated philodendron, fumigated poppy, fumigated ranunculus, fumigated Star-of-Bethlehem, 96 oz. Nalgene cantene, tap water, sulfuryl fluoride ProFume® gas fumigant, 39 days. The other lists its materials as: cotton, Henry Art Gallery logo vector file, 22 days. These material and titling labels are situated on either side of the wall immediately hugging the left-side entrance of the Norcliffe Foundation Room in the north gallery of the upper floor of the Henry.

The labels are also accompanied by texts. The former material list is accompanied by these texts:

We call ours a utilitarian age, and we do not know the uses of any single thing. We have forgotten that water can cleanse, and fire purify, and that the Earth is mother to us all. As a consequence our art is of the moon and plays with shadows, while Greek art is of the sun and deals directly with things.⁷⁷

This is happening because we live today in a time of corruption (as well as among corrupt people) and we have to study as hard as possible to avoid corruption, particularly that of our own time, which takes hold of us before we can avoid it, and also that of the past, because we now know all the vices of art and want to protect ourselves against them. We no longer have the simplicity of the Greeks and Romans or the writers of the 14th and 16th centuries, because we have passed through the time of corruption and have become cunning in our art. We avoid those vices with our cunning and our art, not with nature's help, as the ancients did, who did not know much about them, but who, because art was in its infancy and still not corrupted, neither avoided nor fell into such vices. They were like children who know no vices, we are like old people who know them but avoid them through judgment and experience.⁷⁸

Ikebana is a 550-year-old ephemeral sculptural form that is presented, wilts, dies, and is then discarded. It can seem like a shadow of life. It can depict seasons, geographic location, and economy. It can discuss interpersonal, institutional, and national relations. It is relevant to emotions; it is relevant to a birth or a death. *Ikebana*, as a form that often includes transient, organic materials, challenges many conventions for the expected life of an art object. It is resistant to permanent exhibition, sale, preservation, and documentation. In conjunction with this, *ikebana* underwent an ideological transformation in the early 20th Century. The practice is now free from the limitations of using only flora. This places the practice to an almost ideological consideration, and its framework can apply to mediums like performance, writing, and costume.

⁷⁷ Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1915), 117.

⁷⁸ Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, trans. Kathleen Baldwin, Richard Dixon, David Gibbons, Ann Goldstein, Gerard Slowey, Martin Thom, and Pamela Williams (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 6.

The latter material list is accompanied by this text:

Personal Appearance

Employees with neat, clean appearances are important to the Henry's success, especially where the employees greet the public, or safety considerations require attention to grooming or attire. Employees must dress appropriately for the position held, in professional attire in keeping with a museum environment.

Some general guidelines include (but are not limited to):

- Required: Clothing that is clean and in good repair; modest neck- and hem-lines
- Prohibited: Ripped, torn, excessively revealing, or dirty clothing; garments with logos or symbols that may be construed as discriminatory or offensive

If you have any questions regarding appropriate dress and appearance, you should contact your supervisor or Human Resources. Employees requiring reasonable accommodation for religion-based dress and/or grooming practices should consult with Human Resources.⁷⁹

The work itself is found between these wall labels and texts on the floor of the gallery. The work takes the form of eight Nalgene cantene bottles with the aforementioned fumigated flowers encased within them, as well as altered and de-branded denim jeans alongside boxes filled with 500 sanctioned Henry Art Gallery tote bags designed and produced in occasion for this exhibition. The formal arrangement of these objects changes every day of the run of the exhibition, which lasts a total of 22 days. The denim jeans get released at a rate of one pair per day of the exhibition. Each pair is exhibited for the day of its introduction to the show and then folded and placed in a pile the following morning.

The materials, methods of display, and accompanying texts, are all very deliberate. As stated earlier, the Henry Art Gallery is an institution located in the city of Seattle, Washington. Seattle is a city that has a world-wide musical association with the genre known as "grunge," popularized by the global stardom of the band Nirvana. The style of those participating or in favor of the grunge lifestyle are characterized as wearing loose-fitting flannel (most often plaid) button-up shirts with jeans, particularly pairs that were ripped or in a state of casual disrepair. The casualness of this type of outfit is pervasive in this region of the United States.

Visiting the Henry a number of times throughout my time at the University of Washington, I organically pay attention to the clothing I see being worn by the employees of the Henry. The commonalities across all uniforms is simply a green lanyard indicating they are an employee of the institution, otherwise it seems employees could wear whatever they please. I became interested in learning if the institution enforced a dress code, and if so, if there were parameters that I could tinker with out of my interest in exploring the relationship between clothing and its inherent connection to types of domination placed on the body, whether it be by society or through the workplace, in this case imposed by an institution.

When I was able to get a copy of the employee handbook I was surprised that it specified the clothing must be in a good, clean condition and that this type of apparel is what maintains and

⁷⁹ The Henry Gallery Association Employee Handbook, October 5, 2016, 13-14.

regulates what is otherwise considered an appropriate “museum environment.” That this museum environment is consciously devoid of all ripped clothing by its employees interestingly creates a delineation between those who participate in the day-to-day operations of this institution and the city and culture that the Henry is situated in and effectively surrounded by. To me, this suggestion that there be a standardized understanding of what creates and keeps a museum environment seems coded and built upon harmful standards as it relates to dress, how that relates to class, and by extension, race and cultural upbringing.

Part of what informed the decision as to what type of garment to include in the exhibition, aside from what could relate to Seattle’s grunge past, was in part due to William Gibson’s novel, *Pattern Recognition*. Gibson’s main character, Cayce Pollard, is a brand consultant who has a psychological sensitivity and indexical knowledge of brands across industry. However, Gibson, in his writing, focuses greatly on clothing. He writes of Pollard,

What people take for relentless minimalism is a side effect of too much exposure to the reactor-cores of fashion. This has resulted in a remorseless paring-down of what she can and will wear. She is, literally, allergic to fashion. She can only tolerate things that could have been worn, to a general lack of comment, during any year between 1945 and 2000. She’s a design-free zone, a one-woman school of anti whose very austerity periodically threatens to spawn its own cult.⁸⁰

He goes on to describe her adorned outfit upon waking—

A small boy’s black Fruit Of The Loom T-shirt, thoroughly shrunken, a thin gray V-necked pullover purchased by the half-dozen from a supplier to New England prep schools, and a new and oversized pair of black 501’s, every trademark carefully removed. Even the buttons on these have been ground flat, featureless, by a puzzled Korean locksmith, in the Village, a week ago.⁸¹

The mention of the jeans, a globally ubiquitous garment, being treated and de-branded in such a way, served as a point of departure. Not only did denim have the historical association with certain types of manual labor—a certain type of domination over the body—but was a commonly seen and worn symbol tied to the culture of the city the Henry is located in. That the industry for denim has expanded far beyond just Levi Strauss & Co. is beneficial, in that the sheer volume of companies producing a variety of denim jeans in various styles is innumerable and in such a way could become anonymized or nameless. Because of these reasons, blue denim jeans were to be the recurring material of this exhibition that would be de-branded and destroyed or soiled, to be exhibited daily.

Because the jeans are in response to both Seattle as a cite and limitations placed on the employees for the sake of maintaining the aesthetic and ideological interests of the Henry (as it relates to a viewing audience), I consider this part of the work for employees. Since there are 22 pairs of jeans, and each pair is introduced to the work the morning of every day of the exhibition, it is highly unlikely that anyone aside from the employees patrolling the galleries will see most, if not all, pairs of jeans and arrangements for the work—as all components are rearranged daily

⁸⁰ William Gibson, *Pattern Recognition* (New York: Berkley Books, 2003), 9.

⁸¹ Ibid., 3.

and the previous day's jeans are folded and placed in a stack. At the end of the exhibition, all pairs of jeans will be donated and available for employees to take if they so please.

This handbook stipulation indicating that employee clothing could not be branded, greatly interested me. In today's clothing landscape, branding is pervasive and largely voluntary.⁸² It very much indicates a type of affiliation and simultaneously acts as advertising of an object and perhaps, for some, a representation of affinity for an intangible feeling or attitude.

That the institution specify that no other brands can be present in the gallery, unless they are donors—like the aforementioned Norcliffe Foundation or Microsoft company, both who have dedicated rooms in the Henry—promotes a type of supremacy and fascistic control, predicated on financial giving, over the mental image of the museological space.

Upon reflection of this naming situation, I'm reminded of Michael Asher's piece, *The Michael Asher Lobby*, that existed between 1983 and 1985 at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA). In this piece, Asher negotiated a contract where MoCA would license him the rights to the museum lobby, that Asher would then sub-license back to MoCA while still obtaining aesthetic control over the space. The lobby would function as normal, still run by MoCA staff, but would have the addition of an orange wall-placard—that functioned aesthetically in the same way as that of regular donor placards—that read *The Michael Asher Lobby*. In doing so, Asher, "...was bestowing an honor usually granted in recognition of some type of outstanding or meritorious service by museum benefactors—most typically a large financial donation...[His] proposals expanded from seeking to place the artist as administrator of museum activities to naming the artist as the recipient of an honor associated with museum donors."⁸³

While my piece functions differently in its output, it has a particular focus on naming as it relates to recognizing the power associated with such an action. To expand:

The act of naming is a linguistic convention that, when executed under the proper circumstances, does what it says. Such conventional acts of speech are termed "performatives" by linguistic philosopher J.L. Austin, who differentiates them from ordinary statements. Austin is specifically concerned with the cultural conditions under which utterances function as acts and produce concrete events. Arguing that performative speech acts need to take place within a framework of shared conventions, he cites a number of legitimized institutional or cultural procedures that involve authorized individuals, including the marriage ceremony, naming a ship, making a bet, and bequeathing something in a will. These procedures bestow a particular kind of agency upon specific individuals, such as ministers, ship captains, and wedding ceremony participants, whose words constitute or result in actions. Austin further maintains that these visible formalities must be accompanied by the appropriate set of intentions, inner motives, and subsequent behavior to validate the speech act. When all of these conditions are met—external propriety and internal sincerity—Austin asserts that the resulting performative speech acts yield tangible effects in the material world.

The museum practice of naming spaces and events draws from this performatively conferred

⁸² Whereas in comparison to the past—cattle or slave branding, arguably some of the earliest examples of indication of ownership of another living thing—were often performed without consent. This switch intrigues me.

⁸³ Kirsi Peltomäki, *Situation Aesthetics: The Work of Michael Asher* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2014), 136.

legitimacy. The distribution of architectural space in accordance with a stratification of names is a conventional and well-established part of donor relations, in which the museum names structural spaces in honor of its benefactors. Potential areas include exhibition halls, museum wings, lobbies, entrances, and auditoriums, as well as events and gestures such as prizes, commissions, lecture series, and fellowships—all of which honor specific individuals or corporations in compensation for a donation or service. In that sense, the commemoration of spaces is both a system of compensation (paying tribute to) and privilege (the honoree claims a rarefied status within the museum). Even the most casual museum visitor can attest to the fact that this “accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect” (to quote Austin) transforms a museum’s spaces into dedicated topographies of commemorative plaques or inscriptions that confer personalized honor upon the named dignitary. Within this architectural and administrative inscription of names, the highest honors are conferred in direct relation to the size or prominence of the architectural feature; a single bench or back terrace clearly do not have the same status as a highly visible exhibition space, gallery stroll—or lobby.⁸⁴

It is related to these reasons that I was interested in seeking to produce an item, ideally a type of benign promotional material, that in some way brought attention to the name and branding of the Henry Art Gallery, a space that, as stipulated in the employee handbook, was otherwise void of company, foundation, or family names that otherwise had not paid for sanctioned inclusion on clothing in the space.

Interested in the transactional nature of the appearance of brands or names, in the case of Microsoft or the Norcliffe Foundation, my idea for a Henry branded object came in the form of a tote bag. A tote bag is another ubiquitous item often found in museum stores that function as a piece of advertising and affiliation as much as it does a utilitarian object for storing such products as books, groceries, or cosmetics. In other words, it can be a type of shopping bag.

When asking friends if a Henry tote bag existed, everyone was in agreement that they had definitely been seen in public. However, when I approached the Henry with the proposal asking if such a product existed and if I could contribute to the creation, or recreation, of more of them, I was surprised to find that in fact they had not. I had been told by Henry staff that the Henry had not had a retail outlet since their expansion in 1997 which removed the only bookstore.

In response, I designed a tote bag for the Henry following what, based on promotional materials I had received over my time at the University of Washington, would be on brand for the institution. I wanted the bag to have the appearance that it was produced for the purpose of being nothing more than a promotional tote bag, unrelated to any artwork and having no affiliation to a particular time or exhibition. The end result was a 15”x15” undyed beige, cotton bag that read vertically top-to-bottom, “HENRY” in an on-brand serif font, placed off-kilter, towards the right edge of the bag. This design was approved by Henry Public Relations who provided the brand book and font guidelines.

500 of these bags were produced for the occasion of the exhibition. The bags were shipped in two boxes, each carrying 250 bags. The boxes are branded with such phrases as “WE ♥ PROMOS” and “PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS WORK!” with a chart explaining the average

⁸⁴ Ibid., 140.

percentage of successes related to the making and distribution of promotional objects. The bags appear in two locations in the exhibition. One location is with all components of the work in the Norcliffe Foundation Room. Here they are presented in the boxes in which they are shipped in, signifying that the existence of the bags is part of this artwork by its proximity to the other components of the work and material list that indicates the Henry Art Gallery logo vector file as a material.

This location for the work acts as the backstock, as everyday—alongside a pair of jeans being introduced to the work—bags are removed from their shipping boxes. The removed bags are placed on a hook that is drilled into a wooden stand painted the same white color as the gallery walls and constructed by the installation team. The stand is placed in the vestibule that serves as the crossroads between the James Turrell Skyspace, Microsoft Room, print gallery, and hallway that leads to the Norcliffe Foundation Room. It stands within the archway to the Norcliffe Foundation Room to the left. To take a promotional, branded bag, meant to hold products of whatever size that could fit, before entering into the main exhibition hall of an art gallery of professionalized graduate students—is to throw into relief not only the tacit, yet immediate, legitimizing power of the Henry as an exhibiting art institution, worthy of its own promotional bags, but of the instantaneous transference of all objects into commodities within this exhibition space. To make this action as seamless as possible, the stand has a sign affixed to it that says, “Please take a bag”. This sign stands in contradiction to the placards found with the rest of the work in the Norcliffe Foundation Room that indicates, “Please do not touch”.

The tension between the polar instructions of touching and not touching is something that interests me, considering the imperative to not touch was not my decision, but the institutions. Irena Haiduk points out, “In the West, in order to make something an artwork you have to suck the life out of it, drain it of all utility so that it can be contemplated from a distance.”⁸⁵ All components of the work present in the Norcliffe Foundation Room have utility outside of the gallery. The obvious double-presence of the bags, touchable on the hanger or not to be touched in the box, is ideally the clearest suggestion of this life and death tension Haiduk speaks of.

This notion of life and death is a crucial element of the final component of the work. As explained in the accompanying wall text, *ikebana* wilts, dies, and is then discarded. It also presents complications for the regularly assumed life of an art object in that it can be highly resistant to permanent exhibition, sale, preservation, and documentation. This is most commonly a natural occurrence in the practice of *ikebana*, but for this exhibition at the Henry, the thorough death of the material was mandated.

The Henry Art Gallery, as a collecting institution, places severe restrictions on what kind of materials are considered safe or potentially harmful for the objects within their collection. Anything that is flammable, gaseous, contains liquids (harmful or otherwise), or could be harboring insects, are unlikely to be able to enter into the institution for these materials stand as a liability for the safety of the collection.

In the early meetings with the Henry preparator, I was informed that if I desired to exhibit organic floral materials in the gallery, it was necessary that they be fumigated so as to eliminate

⁸⁵ Irena Haiduk, *Seductive Exacting Realism* (Germany: Sternberg Press, 2016), 00:48:42.

the possibility of any insects entering into the museum space. This mandate was exciting to me as it was a museological restriction that would have very real material consequences on my work, all for the protection of the sequestered artifacts and art objects in the collection.

The company Paratex is the only company in the city of Seattle that has a fumigation chamber regularly used by the USDA, the Washington State Department of Agriculture, various foreign governments to meet import/export requirements, and the Henry Art Gallery. To have material fumigated in the 24' x 9.5' fumigation chamber, one must sign Paratex's "Agreement to Fumigate Plant Material" contract that indicates that their procedure follows USDA instructions and that, "some or all the plant material may be destroyed as a result of the fumigation treatment."

Once I had purchased my materials from the Seattle Wholesaler Growers Market Cooperative, that only provides fresh cut, organically grown flowers—I drove the material to Paratex to be treated with Profume. Profume is a sulfuryl fluoride gas fumigant used to eliminate all pests. It eradicates all life stages of insects and rodents and often used in structures used to store, process and transport most raw and processed commodities. It has been used for the past 55 years in every state in the US and abroad in 18 countries.⁸⁶

The result of using Profume on the plants was significant. What were otherwise vibrant colors of the recently cut flowers had become browned and limp due to the exposure to pesticides. I admired this treatment because it directly went against all conventions, both visually and ideologically of historical *ikebana* models. *Ikebana*, since its formalization over 550 years ago, has largely been about presenting an idealized object of aesthetic beauty and contemplation. After all, the characters that make up the word 'ikebana', translates to literally mean "living flowers," which illustrates the long-standing motivation of making severed flowers appear to still have life in them while they are actually in a process of withering away.

Presenting flowers on the floor or in a state of death or decay stands against this populist bent that morbidly attempts to suspend and mask the fact that these materials are dead and on their way out. Even the running length of *ikebana* exhibitions assists in this morbid fantasy, with most public displays lasting only for the run of a weekend.

To consciously choose to exhibit the flowers in a chemically deadened state with no plan to switch the flowers out during the run of the exhibition, places my work within a lineage of iconoclastic *ikebana* practitioners. My *sensei*, Kosen Ohtsubo, in particular, is an important figure to myself and avant-garde *ikebana* history at large, for having been the first to use vegetables and garbage in arrangements. Oftentimes these materials would find themselves strewn on floors. His point of reference for doing so was ancient Hindu and Buddhist rituals in India, where plucked flowers were tossed onto sculptures representing offerings to deities.⁸⁷ My reason for having the flowers in bottles on the floor had less to do with referencing Indian ritual and more to do with the restrictions placed on acceptable material at the Henry in the institution's attempt to protect their commodities at all costs. Poisoned and rotting flowers sealed

⁸⁶ "How It Works – Profume," Profume, June 3, 2018, <https://profume.com>.

⁸⁷ This practice, in the face of *ikebana* traditionalists, was considered blasphemous, although this Indian practice was the origin for what would centuries later become *ikebana*, through cultural exchange to China and finally Japan.

within alien, but nearly anthropomorphized, lung-like bottles, stood largely as metaphor for the Henry's ironic attempt at ever-preserving a collection of lifeless and withering garments. My intentional placement of the articles on the floor was to forego traditional museological presentation methods and suggest tension between the hermetic, surgical membrane of the bottle holding within it toxic and harmful materials just above the well-kept parquet maple floors.

As the accompanying text from Oscar Wilde suggests that the artwork of our current times is less about our ability to speak of actual "things" and more about shadow play, I thought of this action and presentation, in relation to the other components of the work as both metaphorical and the products of presenting work within the small confines of the institution. This building, built by humans and given importance by humans, occludes the light of the sun, and presents within it a type of virtual-reality. This virtual-reality simulates many things of the world surrounding it, but it controls and limits its ability to enter into its emphatic space. Conversely, it's hard for something inside this VR to leave or interact with the larger framework once in said space.

In response to this situation, life is attempted to be brought back to all of these components following the end of exhibition. The tote bags get taken over the run of the show, to be depleted by the closing date. The jeans re-enter the world through their donation to Henry employees, who can, based on their employee dress code, only wear them outside of work. And the bottles get thoroughly cleaned to return as containers for drinking. The sun will ostensibly touch all of these things, and over time they will wither and die an arguably more natural death as opposed to the cryogenic treatment they receive in a context that is present in such places as the Henry Art Gallery.

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My work largely situates itself in relation to the politics of production and reproduction. Where this interest comes from revolves around my participation in studying and making *ikebana*. I gravitate towards *ikebana* as it is an artistic pursuit that inherently takes into account the situation in which it is created and presented in. This type of material and situation specificity and self-awareness intrigues me, especially as what is produced passes naturally and is of an inherently fleeting nature.

Arguably, this notion gets thrown into question when one considers avant-garde and contemporary *ikebana* practices, that reduce *ikebana* to a set of rules or considerations. In this contemporaneous situation, I think of clothing and its arrangement on the body as the closest analog to the practice of making *ikebana*. Clothing has been used historically in avant-garde *ikebana* arrangements, dating back to the 1970s when Kosen Ohtsubo himself would either make clothing out of floral material, or use clothing made of plants, such as cotton, as a material to be arranged.

While individual garments, that could be likened to a single flower, are a harder case to argue for being a type of contemporary *ikebana* work, outfits have a much stronger case in their consideration for relative components and situation that take into account season, site, emotion, occasion, among other variables. Like *ikebana*, outfits are site specific, in that they are geographically present only on the body they contain. They can be documented, but in doing so

there is a dangerous approximation and freezing of an image that flattens and squashes the life out of both the outfit and *ikebana* arrangement.

At the end of the day, the outfit is taken off and put away to get reordered and rearranged—similar enough to the *ikebana* arrangement, that wilts and is disposed of, to be remade and return anew.

The type of specificity and rigor that I demand in my making of any thing, be it *ikebana* or otherwise, or the presentation of any situation I participate in, like my work at the Henry, is present in my interrogation of clothing as a subject. However, to comprehensively discuss the history and material effects the past 20,000 years of textiles and its industry has had on society at large is a feat. Its industrial supply chain includes growers, pickers, spinners, weavers, dyers—and if turned into clothing—designers, patterners, seamstresses, tailors, cleaners, among others. Accounting for the social condition reinforced by this supply chain, in its products adorned or actions taken towards human bodies, is by no means a straightforward account. Implicated in all of this are fallen empires, agricultural technologies, lost artisanal knowledge, the expansion of commerce and governance, among many other fields and histories of societal developments.

Maybe it's all too much for me, but I'll attempt to chip away at it from my small corner with my flowers, acting selfishly and unsure of how art, let alone my own, in its absurd myopia, does much of anything aside from please myself. Maybe, however, that's enough in the long run.

“Polite art does not believe that guilt is the price of being alive.”⁸⁸

&

“;) we all need to work. and all work involves hypocrisy.

love, terre”⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Irena Haiduk, *Bon Ton Mais Non*, 85.

⁸⁹ Terre Thaemlitz, e-mail message to author, October 10, 2017.

My sincerest thanks and appreciation to:

Rebecca Cummins

Ellen Garvens

Aaron Flint Jamison

Emily Zimmerman

Megan Rosaria Dutra

Jackie Granger

Curtis Knapp

Sean Lockwood

Charles Stobbs III

Michael Van Horn

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